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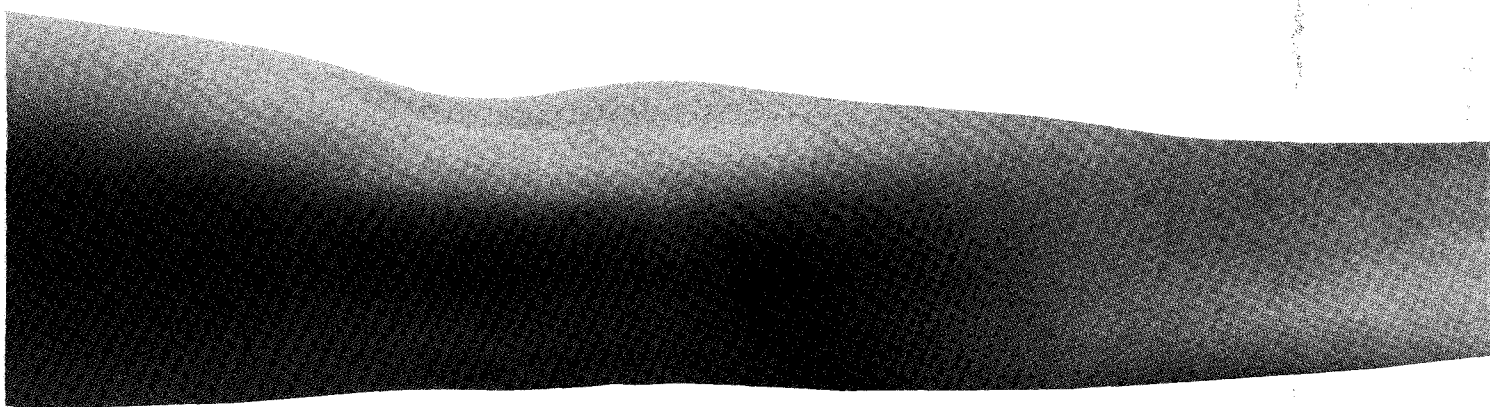
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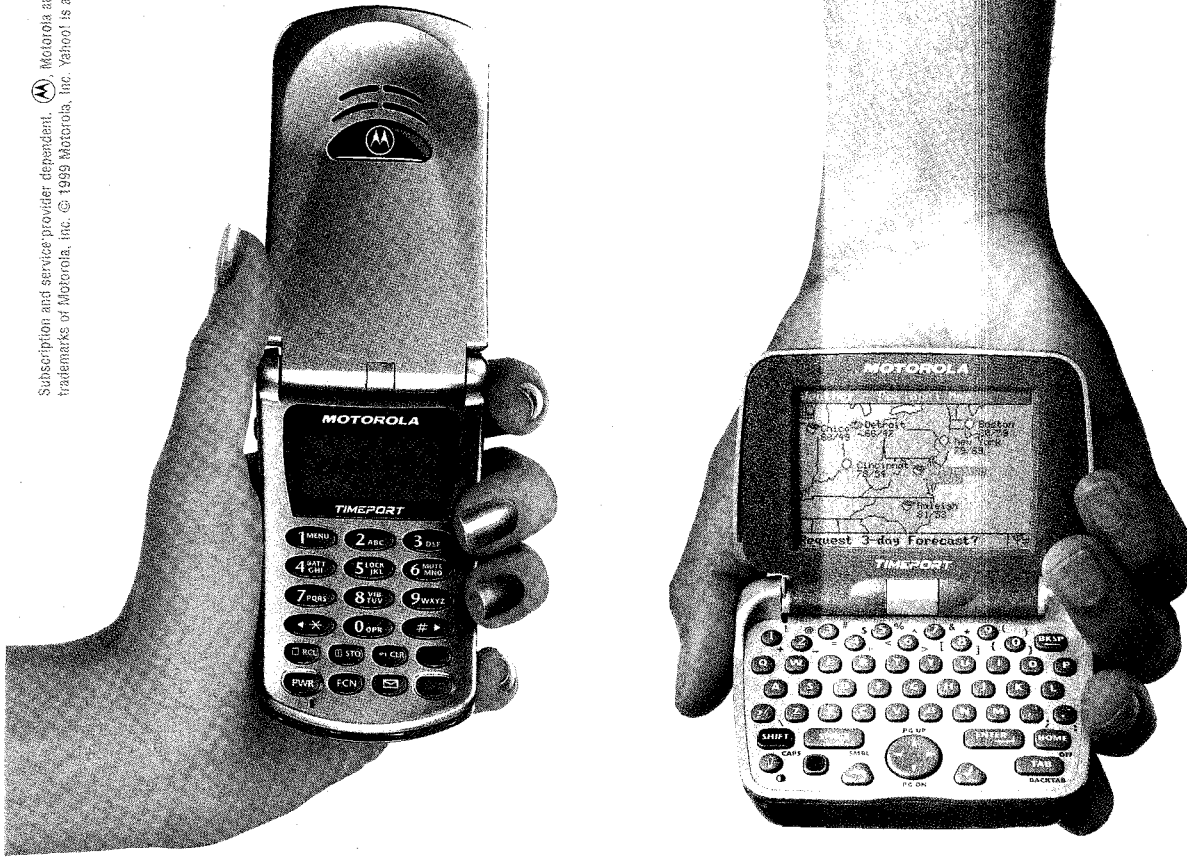


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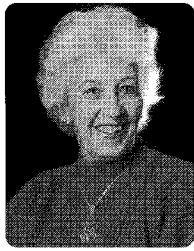
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THE NEW YORKER

DECEMBER 20, 1999

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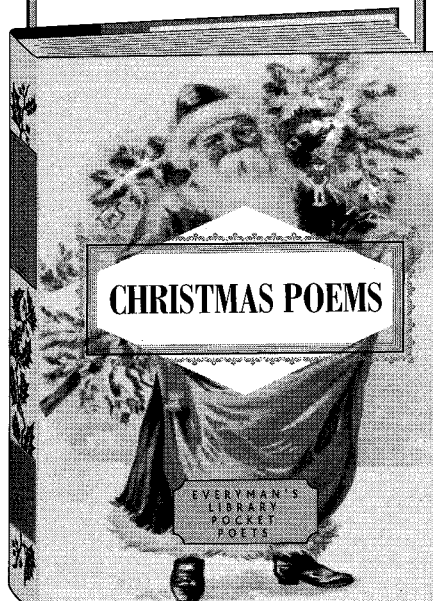


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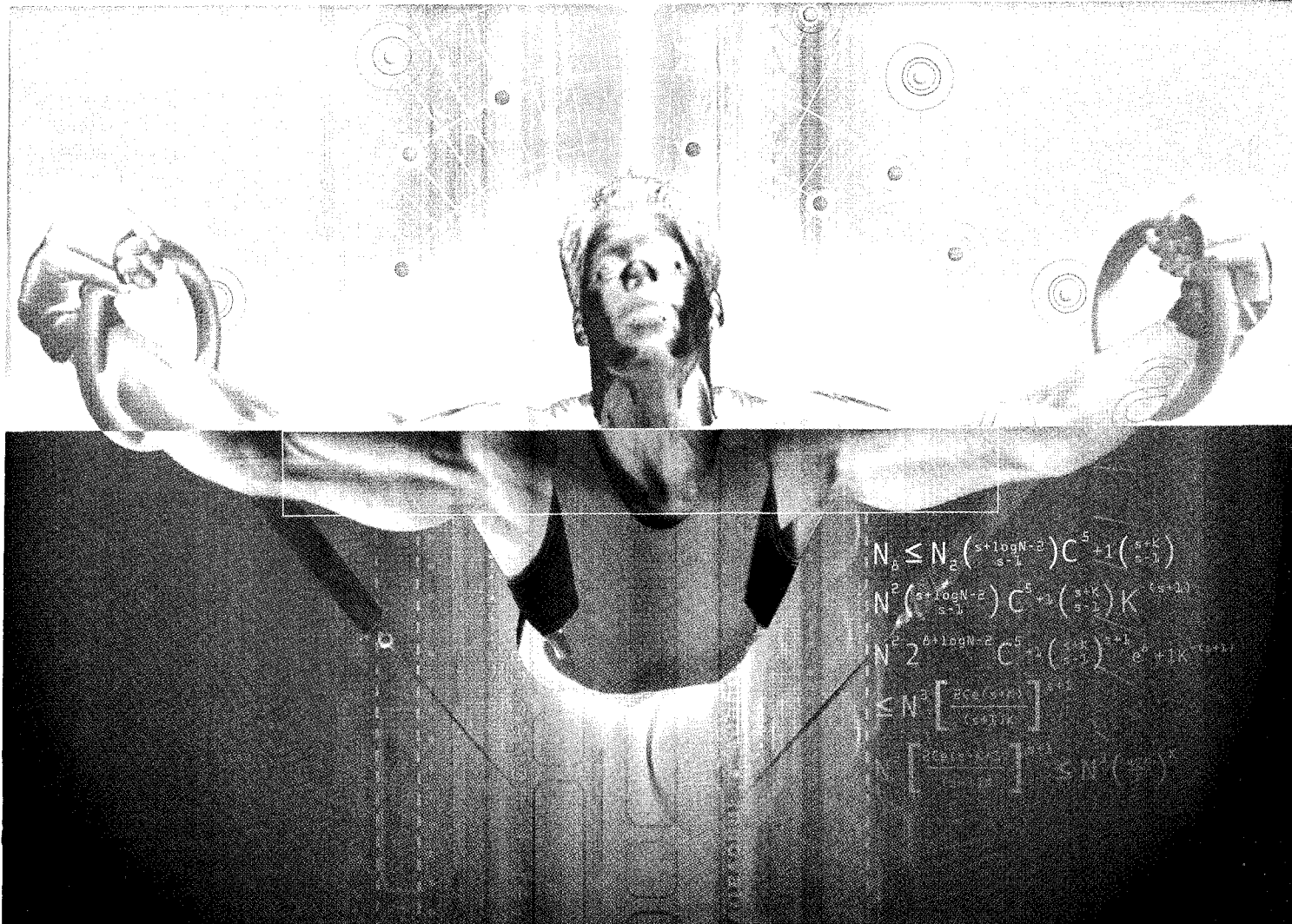
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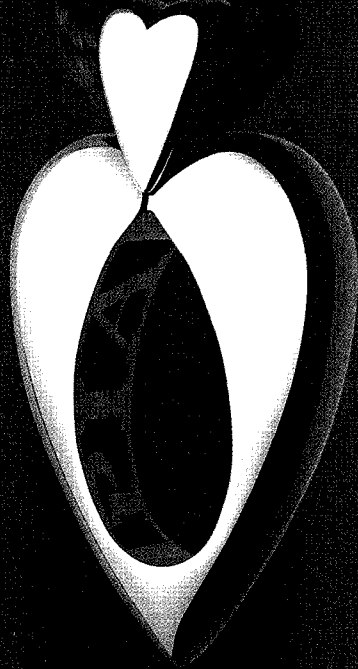
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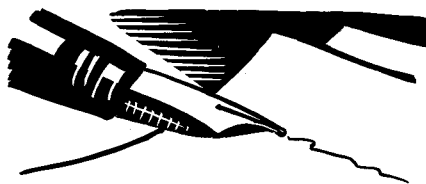
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THE MAIL



REDRESSING HILLARY

Joan Acocella, a dance critic, reviews my biography of Hillary Clinton, "Hillary's Choice," like a fashion critic (Books, December 13th). A whole page is devoted to my descriptions of Hillary's physical appearance over the years, while the points those details were intended to make are ignored.

I must take exception to Acocella's charge that the book's "lack of firsthand testimony leaves a big, weird hole." She doesn't understand the concept of reporting and thus completely dismisses the book as "low-minded." Did she fail to notice the revelations gleaned from thirty letters written by Hillary herself during her four years at Wellesley? Did she skip over the many conversations I recounted between myself and Hillary? (From 1995: "I know I'm the projection for many of those wounded men. . . . It's not me, personally, they hate—it's the changes I represent.") Did she not notice original interviews I did with Hillary's mother ("Hillary was able to [keep going through the Monica year] because she had a commitment to her daughter—somebody outside of her own problems that she was being strong and positive for"); with her pastor, Ed Matthews ("There is something almost superficial or synthetic that seems to be what ultimately binds this family together"); with her first love, David Rupert ("She didn't know how to be comfortable pursuing political ambitions for herself"); with one of her best friends from the nineteen-seventies, Nancy Pietrefesa ("Her father was an impossible person to please . . . a deeply narcissistic man who saw her as competition and tried to undermine her sexuality"); with family friend Carolyn Staley ("Look, Hillary's tough as nails. Bill has always deferred to women to fight his battles"); with former Arkansas Governor Frank White ("I knew whenever she showed up that I needed to leave. She'd put the trial lawyer face on and chop me up"); with Hillary's closest personal aide over

the years, Carolyn Huber ("I don't think there's ever been a time when Hillary set her mind to something she wanted to happen that it hasn't happened"); with her White House scandal manager, Jane Sherburne ("Hillary lacks self-awareness")? Acocella asks, "How does Sheehy know? Apparently she just knows." Some four hundred sources, almost all named, contributed illuminating stories and allowed me to trace where Hillary's original choice—to suppress her own political ambition—has led her and the nation. I regret that Acocella deliberately ignored the content and complexity of my biographical portrait.

GAIL SHEEHY
 New York City

Joan Acocella replies: I stand by my statement that Sheehy's book cites no interview with Hillary Clinton after 1992. (The 1995 remark was apparently made when the two women ran into one another somewhere.) If Sheehy will reread my review, she will find that this was the "hole" I spoke of. She will also see that I pointed out that she interviewed people other than Hillary. As for the complexity of her portrait, that is a judgment call, on which we disagree.

OUR MODERN BOSWELL?

Hi A.G.! (Comment, December 6th, by Adam Gopnik.) glad you thnk email=18c.literary reviv'l! LOL! wish i had time to polish e-style so cld get publishd in 100 yrs as famous e-mail-writer :)/ but oh my full mailbox! so much to forward, redirect, reply & trash!! attachments to check for viruses (nasty buggers!), spam to delete, crashes to undo!so little time!

PEGGY TROUPIN
 contact@classactinc.net

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE: The ballot for the first annual *New Yorker* Book Awards can be found on page 51.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," *The New Yorker*, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



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- Dennis Cunningham, WGBS-TV

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- Ben Brantley, The New York Times

Exactly the sort of good-time Broadway show that folks say they don't make anymore. It'll keep you smiling into the next century!

- Michael Sommers, The Star-Ledger

COLE PORTER'S best show has piles of witty and dreamy songs, and a winking backstage book by **SAM AND BELLA SPEWACK!**

- Linda Winer, Newsday

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- Jacques le Sourd, Gannett Newspapers

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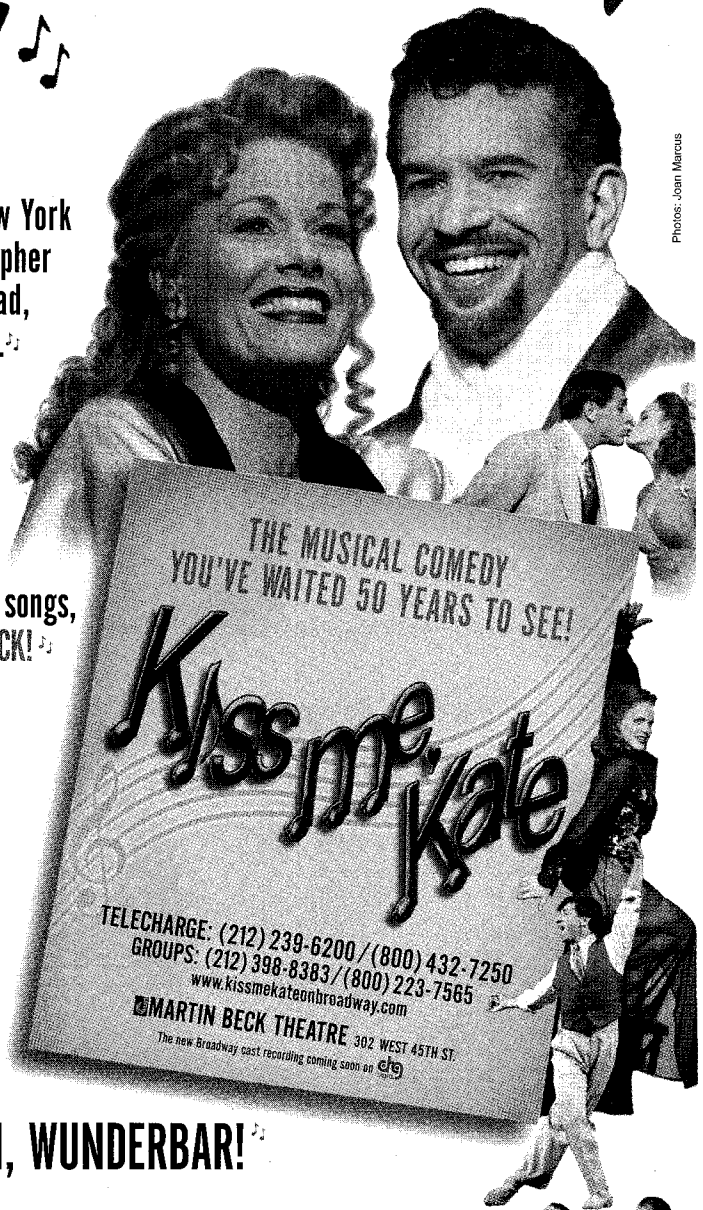
- Pat Collins, WWOR-TV

Fresh and funny! **AMY SPANGER** is wonderfully sexy and **MICHAEL BERRESSE** is dashing!

- David Patrick Stearns, USA Today

WUNDERBAR, WUNDERBAR AND, AGAIN, WUNDERBAR!

- Clive Barnes, New York Post



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KISS ME, KATE

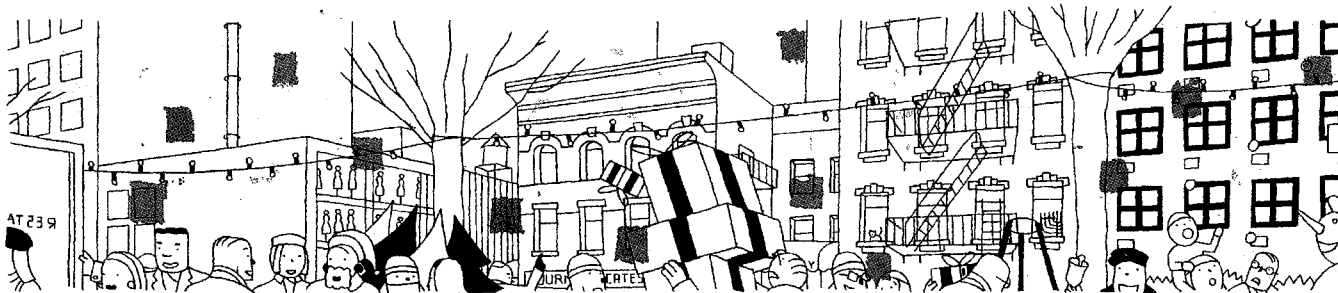
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MUSICAL DIRECTION BY **PAUL GEMIGNANI**
CHOREOGRAPHY BY **KATHLEEN MARSHALL**
DIRECTED BY **MICHAEL BLAKEMORE**





THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

DIRTY BLONDE—Claudia Shear ("Blown Sideways Through Life") stars in a play she wrote, about two single New Yorkers who happen to meet at the grave of Mae West. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

HAMLET—Liev Schreiber is the prince, in a Public Theatre staging directed by Andrei Serban. In previews through Dec. 18. Opens Dec. 19 at 2. (425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

IS THERE LIFE ON MARS?—Piotr Mamonov, the Russian poet, composer, actor, and leader of the rock band Zvuki Mu, brings his one-man adaptation of Chekhov's "The Proposal" to the Tribeca Performing Arts Center. Two shows only: Dec. 17-18 at 8. (199 Chambers St. 346-8510.)

WAITING IN THE WINGS—Two elderly actresses and rivals (Lauren Bacall and Rosemary Harris) find themselves in the same retirement home, in Noël Coward's 1960 play. Directed by Michael Langham. Two previews on Dec. 15. Opens Dec. 16 at 6:45. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ADAM BAUM AND THE JEW MOVIE—Ron Leibman stars as a Jewish movie mogul who hires a Gentile (Christopher Evan Welch) to write a film about anti-Semitism, in a comedy by Daniel Goldfarb. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

ADOBE THEATRE COMPANY—This fairy-tale satire (with an unprintably naughty title) is much more fun than it ought to be. Jeff Goode's script is cotton candy—delightful to look at, but insubstantial. Aided by Bernard Grenier's unforgettable costumes, the engaging comic cast would be right at home on any vaudeville stage, and they make the audience forget the play's lack of edge (Vin Knight, as the Storyteller, and Peter Dinklage, as the Handsome Prince, are particularly good). Beware, however: this holiday fare is only for those families who watch "South Park" unbleeped; the Fairy Godphallus, though charming, is the least of it. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

AMADEUS—From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

ANOTHER AMERICAN: ASKING & TELLING—A one-man show written and performed by Marc Wolf, based on his interviews with gay and straight military personnel from the Second World War to the present. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

THE BOMB-ITTY OF ERRORS—A hip-hop adaptation of Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors." (45 Bleecker, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 307-4100.)

CONTACT—The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, co-conceived with John Weidman, is a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection, the atmosphere of longing. It's

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/18-25/99.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

THE COUNTRY CLUB—Douglas Carter Beane's satire on the young suburban set is loaded with witty dialogue, and the production is graced by the Drama Dept.'s always good acting and a fine set, but Beane's writing

for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. (11/1/99) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DINNER WITH FRIENDS—Donald Margulies's new play concerns two upper-middle-class couples who have been married for a dozen or so years; one of them survives the wear and tear of marriage, and the other doesn't. It's an intelligent depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage, and the cast give well-rounded performances. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

ECLIPSED—Patricia Burke Brogan's drama, set in the sixties in western Ireland, about a group of unwed mothers confined to labor in a "Magdalene laundry" (created by the Catholic Church to keep fallen women away from sin and men). The history is fascinating, but the play is awkward and gaspingly earnest, and less engaging than the recent news reports on the same subject. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Dec. 19.)

1839—Gale Gates et al.'s new production is a multimedia meditation on the mind of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597.)

ELSA EDGAR—Bob Kingdom portrays both J. Edgar Hoover and Elsa Maxwell, in a play he wrote with Neil Bartlett, which examines the power of public relations. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

ENTER THE NIGHT—The Signature Theatre Company's Maria Irene Fornes season continues with a 1993 drama. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes Dec. 19.)

EPIC PROPORTIONS—A spoof of the making of a Biblical movie on location in the Arizona desert during the early thirties; it dramatizes many plagues, but no plague greater than the one that corporate culture has visited on Broadway in the last few years. What's strange in a piece that has no ear for the moment is that it contains the pitch-perfect performance of Kristin Chenoweth, a comedienne of terrific originality and charm. (10/18-25/99) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE EXACT CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE—An amiable comedy by Joan Vail Thorne, lightly seasoned with insight, about a classic Southern dragon-lady mother (Frances Sternhagen, in a beautiful performance). (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

FUDDY MEERS—The very promising playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's kitchen-sink comedy goes so over the top that you might miss



"Uncle Jack," Jeff Cohen's version of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya."

suffers from a peculiar shallowness almost worthy of his characters. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 541-8441. Closes Dec. 18.)

DAME EDNA: THE ROYAL TOUR—Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant

the melancholy beneath the absurd chaos. In a cast of characters (played by the best comic ensemble in years) which includes a blissful amnesiac, a maimed criminal with a speech impediment, a protective mother whose stroke has rendered her Caryl Churchill cryptic, and a sweet kook who expresses his anger with a hand puppet, no one is who they seem and everyone is connected in surprising ways, and through surprising needs—the *Über*-dysfunctional family? (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Jan. 2.)

FULLY COMMITTED—This hilarious one-man comedy, a tribute to starving actors slaving away in the restaurant “industry” in order to make ends meet, has reopened at a new theatre. Mark Setlock plays a lovable reservations clerk at an unnamed tony Manhattan restaurant, who deals with the daily deluge of calls from dying-to-be guests. Developed by Setlock and the playwright Becky Mode. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

GHOSTS—Ibsen’s 1881 drama. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 279-4200.)

GIVE ME YOUR ANSWER, DO!—In Brian Friel’s latest drama, two Irish friends and novelists, one a commercial failure, the other a best-seller, come together with their wives (and some in-laws and a literary archivist) for a late-summer afternoon of cocktails and angst. The whole thing builds

to a vaguely “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” fervor in the second act, but the performances are exhilarating, so you forgive the unnecessarily melodramatic ending. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900. Closes Jan. 2.)

HOME OF THE BRAVE—A Jewish Repertory Theatre revival of Arthur Laurents’s drama, about anti-Semitism in the military during the Second World War. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

HURRICANE—Erin Cressida Wilson’s comedy of manners. (C.S.C., 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 10. Closes Dec. 19.)

IF MEMORY SERVES—Elizabeth Ashley is a fading television actress whose son (Sam Trammell) causes a scandal by making his recollections of his childhood public, in a comedy by Jonathan Tolins. Directed by Leonard Foglia. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

JAMES JOYCE’S THE DEAD—Playwrights Horizons’ musical version of the short story has moved to Broadway’s Belasco Theatre for a limited-run encore engagement. (11/8/99) (111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

JOLSON & CO.—The York Theatre Company kicks off its season with a musical about the life of Al Jolson. (Theatre at St. Peter’s Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

KAT AND THE KINGS—A rock-and-roll musical set in Cape Town in 1957. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 2.)



SANTA, BABY: The gender-bending comedienne Lea DeLaria, who’s got a mean set of pipes that recall Rosemary Clooney and a charismatic delivery worthy of Bobby Darin, is bringing racy holiday cheer to Joe’s Pub this month. (The reindeer aren’t in the show; isn’t Christmas about fantasies?) In between antics—fending off a belligerent elf, helping a ding-a-ling actress lost on her way to an audition—DeLaria offers lovely and knowing renditions of holiday classics, as well as “Mele Kalikimaka,” in a coconut bra and grass skirt, and a New Year’s love song, by phone, to her current unrequited crush, Natalie Portman. As tough and trashy as she tries to be (“When a woman is giving birth, it’s not a silent night,” she says), DeLaria’s heartbreaking voice tells it all. When she finally gets around to “Silent Night,” the experience is transporting.

KEEP BANGIN’—“Stomp” showed that you can cook up an evening of theatre out of percussion alone, but this show proves it better. The ten-man cast is led by Jared Crawford, who, with his million-toothed smile, firestorm of dreads, and rare genius, lifts the whole thing into a kind of art heaven. (Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 254-5076.)

KISS ME, KATE—Brian Stokes Mitchell and Marin Mazzie star in a revival of the Cole Porter musical, under the direction of Michael Blakemore. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

MARIE CHRISTINE—Michael John LaChiusa’s new musical, set in New Orleans in the eighteenth century, starring Audra McDonald. Graciela Daniele is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

MAYBE BABY, IT’S YOU—Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show’s accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Sharian and Shari Simpson. There’s an undercurrent of sweetness and longing that makes the evening more than a series of skits—it’s what you instinctively know at thirty but wish you’d learned at twenty. Directed with a sure, light touch by Jeremy Dobrish. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

MINNELLI ON MINNELLI—Liza sings songs made famous through the movie musicals her father, Vincente, directed. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 2.)

MORNING, NOON AND NIGHT—A day in the life of the eccentric, obsessive monologist Spalding Gray, removed from his natural habitat (New York City) and transplanted to an old house in Sag Harbor, where he lives in anxiety-tinged bliss with his girlfriend, stepdaughter, and two young sons. A haze of happiness hangs over the whole thing, which makes it seem a bit toothless, but Gray tells a good coming-of-age story, and his self-mocking exaggerations are actually endearing when turned on the domestic universe. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 1.)

THE PRICE—In Arthur Miller’s 1968 play, a failed, dutiful brother, who thinks that life has given him a bad deal, cuts another bad deal, this time with a furniture dealer. But when his successful sibling turns up, the play becomes a negotiation about their family history, an agreement that can’t be reached. As the rivalry is played out, the audience watches the riveting spectacle of a man clinging to a self-destructive illusion, despite all evidence to the contrary. As a metaphor for our culture of complaint, it ain’t bad. And neither are the performances. “The Price” is not a waste of time, which is saying a lot on Broadway these days. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

PUTTING IT TOGETHER—A revue celebrating the songs of Stephen Sondheim, starring Carol Burnett. Directed by Eric D. Schaeffer. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

THE RAINMAKER—Jayne Atkinson and Woody Harrelson star in the Roundabout Theatre Company’s revival of Richard Nash’s 1954 drama. Scott Ellis is the director. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

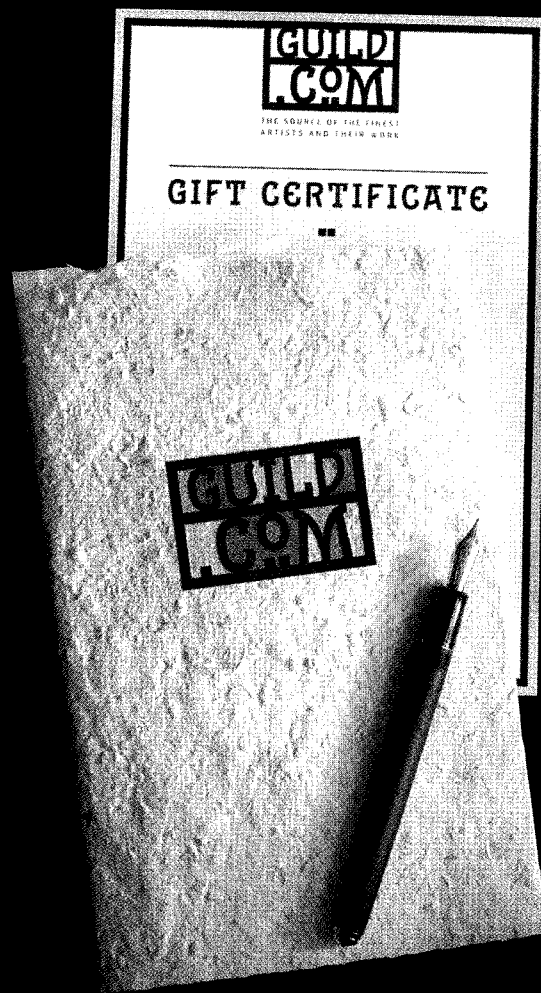
SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER—The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SEX—Mae West’s 1926 play (which landed her in the pokey) about a savvy prostitute (Carolyn Beaumier). With music by Steven Bernstein’s Sex Mob. Elyse Singer is the director. (Gershwin Hotel Living Room, 7 E. 27th St. 439-8112.)

SHYSTER—Fisher Stevens, Annabella Sciorra, and Phyllis Newman are in the cast of a comedy by Bryan Goluboff, staged by Naked Angels. (Blue Heron, 123 E. 24th St. 279-4200. Closes Dec. 19.)

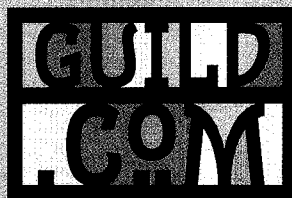
SPACE—In this exploration of the nature of the universe (the plot involves a famous psychologist whose world is rocked when he meets three patients with similar alien-abduction stories), the playwright and director Tina Landau obviously wants to boldly go where no playwright has gone before. Unfortunately, she tries to take on so many

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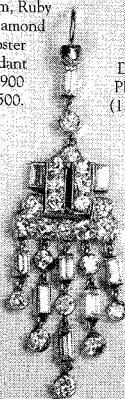
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huge ideas in such a short time that what she comes up with is ultimately shallow and assaultive—what it might feel like piloting a spaceship through a meteor shower. It's too bad—not just for the audience but also for the good and noble cast. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes Dec. 19.)

SWING!—A musical salute to the genre, directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

TANGO ARGENTINO—An encore staging of the great 1983 dance revue. Nine pomaded couples, together with four excellent singers, tell us everything there is to know about the love that kills. The sexiest, most glamorous, most virtuosic dancing on Broadway. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 9.)

TRUDY BLUE—The latest play from Marsha Norman ("Night, Mother") explores the pitfalls of the writer's life: a novelist finds herself almost unable to distinguish between the characters she invents and "talks to" all day long and her real family. It's a common theme, but superbly told in this rendition, and the simple lesson—that sometimes life is better in the real world than inside your head—is one that's all too easy to forget. Polly Draper plays the writer; Julia McIlvaine, as her thirteen-year-old daughter, steals the show with an intelligent, composed performance. Directed by Michael Sexton. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes Dec. 18.)

TRUE HISTORY AND REAL ADVENTURES—Michael Mayer directs a play by Sybille Pearson, about a Scottish girl who comes to America in search of Calamity Jane. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3366. Closes Jan. 2.)

UNCLE JACK—The director and writer Jeff Cohen's contemporary adaptation of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." He manages, unlike some adaptors, to make an ever-fresh play seem newly accessible without raising the question "Why bother?" It's set on the expansive estate of a rural West Virginia family, and with the regrettable exception of Bernard K. Addison's scenery-chewing performance as the doctor, it's a sweet and rewarding experience. A charmer. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 604-4195.)

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES—Eve Ensler's one-woman show is based on interviews she conducted with two hundred women about their vaginas. There's a certain amount of shtick involved, but most of the stories she tells are touching and memorable. Often sadly so: Ensler makes you realize that when it comes to treating women and their bodies with real respect, the world still has miles to go. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Y2K—James Naughton and Patricia Kalember portray an affluent New York couple whose lives are turned upside down by a computer hacker, in a drama by Arthur Kopit. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. ... **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747. ... **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. ... **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. ... **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. ... **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. ... **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. ... **THE FANTASTICS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sulli-

van St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. ... **FOOT-LOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. ... **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. ... **FOSSE:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. ... **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. ... **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. ... **IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. (Closes Jan. 9.) ... **JERKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. ... **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. ... **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. ... **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. ... **MISS**



Susan Marshall & Company in "The Descent Beckons."

SAIGON: Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. ... **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. ... **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. ... **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. ... **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. ... **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. ... **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. ... **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. ... **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. ... **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. ... **THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T SAY PAST MIDNIGHT:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313. ... **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. ... **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

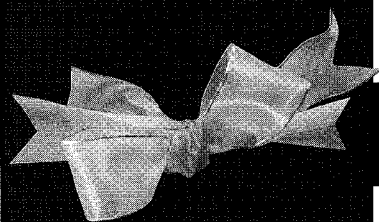
DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—With its annual "Nutcracker" enchantment, the company returns to the business of inspiring little girls in pigtails to dream of a life *en pointe*. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Dec. 14-16 and Dec. 21 at 6, Dec. 17 at 8, Dec. 18 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 19 at 1 and 5.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE—Dec. 15 at 8: A medley of Ailey works, including "Revelations." ... ¶ Dec. 16 at 8: "Lettres d'Amour," "Echo: Far from Home," and "The Prodigal Prince." ... ¶ Dec. 17 at 8: "Streams," "Cry," "Memoria," and "Revelations." ... ¶ Dec. 18 at 2: "Divining," "Fever Swamp," "After Eden," and "Revelations." ... ¶ Dec. 18 at 8: "Bad Blood," "Episodes," and "Grace." ... ¶ Dec. 19 at 3: "Streams," "Cry," "Memoria," and "Revelations." ...

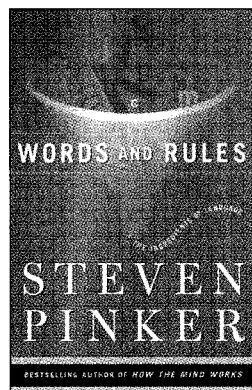
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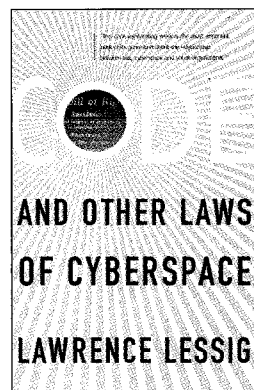
"If you are not already a Steven Pinker addict, this book will make you one."

—Jared Diamond, winner of the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for *Guns, Germs, and Steel*

"A gem."

—*New York Times*

THE POLITICS OF CYBERSPACE



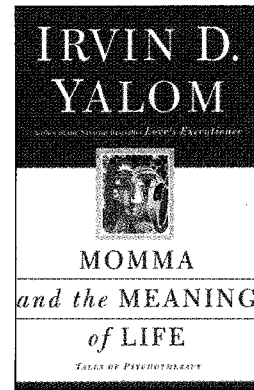
"This dark, exhilarating work is the most important book of its generation about the relationship between law, cyberspace and social organization."

—*The New Republic*

"Lessig lays out a set of principles to guide legal thinking about the Internet for years to come."

—*Wired*

MEANINGFUL ENCOUNTERS



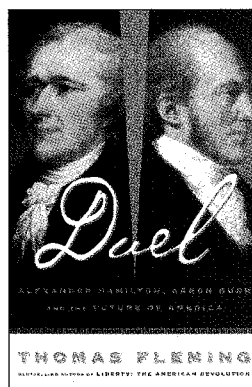
"A worthy sequel to the author's bestselling *Love's Executioner*."

—*Kirkus* (Starred Review)

"This is a chance to get inside the mind of a brilliant therapist and witness the soul breaking through."

—Mark Epstein, M.D., author of *Thoughts Without a Thinker* and *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart*

HISTORY AND INTRIGUE

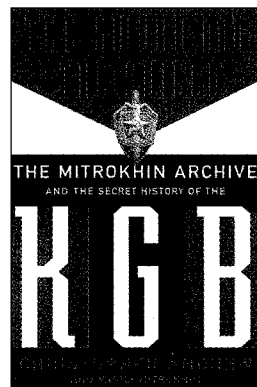


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—*AP Newswires*

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—*Salon*



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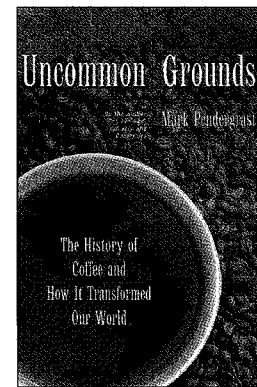
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¶ Dec. 19 at 7:30: "Divining," "Echo: Far from Home," and "Hymn." ... ¶ Dec. 21 at 8: "Danger Run," "C-Sharp Street, B-Flat Avenue," and "Grace." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Jan. 2.)

SUSAN MARSHALL & COMPANY—Although she originally intended to examine rituals of the New Year, the notion of rebirth out of darkness, and so on, the choreographer Susan Marshall has ended up with an evening-length work, "The Descent Beckons," with a wry chance-tense of a narrator (Lisa Kron) and a hundred inflatable dolls, who, in the hands of the dancers, endure absurd fates and take to the air in improbable pink flights. The music, by Twisted Tutu, features advanced variations on piano-bar standards. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 14-18 at 8 and Dec. 19 at 2 and 7:30.)

"TENDER: THE NURSES PROJECT"—After two years of discussion and choreographic invention under the direction of Peggy Peloquin, a group of dancers and nurses present a work that combines movement with stories about the intuition of nurses and the presence of the soul in the delivery room and the emergency room and at the moment of death. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Dec. 16-18 at 8 and Dec. 19 at 3.)



Stereolab sets up shop for a three-night stand at Irving Plaza.

"AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A LIAR"—David Gordon and the Pick Up Performance Company end the Silver Series celebrations that have marked Danspace Project's twenty-fifth year with a choreographic retrospective of new and old works. Gordon calls the effort, which includes segments of pieces from 1975 to 1999, an "event full of half-remembered half-truths about dances made another time in another life accommodating the talents of performers I was in love with and remade for the talents of performers I hope to be in love with now." (Danspace Project, St. Marks In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Dec. 16-19 at 8:30.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

"TROMBONE TITANS"—Septuagenarian trombonist Al Grey, a canny stylist who made his name with Basie's band, will be flanked by the raucous New Wave trombonist Ray Anderson and Wynton Marsalis associate Wycliffe Gordon. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Dec. 16 at 8.)

FATBOY SLIM—Also known as Norman Cook, this barrel-chested bloke from the seaside hamlet of Brighton, England, is this year's knob-twirling new sensation, having logged a few snappy chart hits (especially "Praise You," whose video was directed by Spike Jonze) and scored innumerable commercials and film soundtracks. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. Dec. 17-18 at 9.)

"OUR SINATRA"—A two-act revue featuring the Chairman's favorite songs, written and performed by singer and pianist Eric Comstock and his friends Christopher Gines and Hilary Kole. (Blue Angel Theatre, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200. Opens Dec. 19 at 7:30.)

THE KOREAN FOLK MUSIC INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE FROM JAPAN—The thirty-seven-member group makes its United States debut. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Dec. 21 at 8.)

CLUBS

(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

ARLENE GROCERY, 95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—Dec. 20: Singer-songwriter **MARK GEARY** has been a

regular on the downtown scene since he left his home town of Dublin some six years ago. His songs are lyrical takes on the passing moments of each day, and he brings to the stage the quiet confidence of a traveller.

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 16: Songwriter **RICHARD BARONE** leads an abridged choral version of Handel's "Messiah," with downtown guitarist **GARY LUCAS** assisting and radio disk jockey **VIN SCILSA** ("Idiot's Delight") providing the narration. Dec. 17-18: More seasonal glee, with former Styx guitarist **GLEN BURTNIK** and friends singing holiday tunes.

BOWERY BALLROOM, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 16: A night of revival ska, with local act **MEPHISKAPHELES**. Dec. 18: **MARK GEARY'S CHRISTMAS BISCUIT TOUR** (see Arlene Grocery). With **ROUGE'S MARCH**, the fiery rocking band of Hibernians led by the barroom-seasoned baritone of Joe Hurley.

BROWNIES, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Dec. 18: **DAVID POE**, a promising downtown singer who writes songs of bitterness and despair, lights up for a Christmas party. Dec. 21: **MIKE VIOLA AND THE CANDY BUTCHERS**. Viola's latest release is the aptly

ANNABELLE WRIGHT

titled "Falling Into Place," his first full-length album in a career that's included singing the title song for Tom Hanks's movie "That Thing You Do!" and outlasting all the original members of his four-year-old band. Viola's an excellent songwriter, and this album is well worth the wait. With **ANDY STOCHANSKY**. Stochansky has been Ani Di-Franco's drummer for the past seven years, but that hasn't kept him from the studio. In 1995 he put out an independent release of his own quirky atmospheric music, and he's returned now with "Radio Fusebox," a collection of darkly charming ballads and not-quite-ready-for-the-pop-charts songs.

DOWNTIME, 251 W. 30th St. (695-2747)—Dec. 17: **JJ BONES**, a singer-songwriter in the vein of Lou Reed and Leonard Cohen, performs, backed by a video montage created by documentary filmmaker Maria Lovett and photographer Sarah Shatz.

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Dec. 17: **MIKE VIOLA AND THE CANDY BUTCHERS** (see Brownies). Dec. 18: The fierce and uncompromising folk and blues singer **TOSHI REAGON** rings in the holidays. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 14-16: **STEREOLAB**. If Hal from "2001: A Space Odyssey" had moved to Paris, bought a bunch of Serge Gainsbourg LPs, and taken up a second career as a d.j., he might have created something like the sound of this arty London outfit. It's as if amplifiers, mixing boards, and old Moog synthesizers had grown tired of just being equipment and decided to run things themselves. The result is lush and surprisingly human, as evidenced by the group's latest album, the engaging "Cobra and Phases Group Play Voltage in the Milky Night." With the Chicago composer and producer **JIM O'ROURKE** on Dec. 14, top-shelf Welsh rockers **GORKY'S ZYGOTIC MYNCI** on Dec. 15, and on Dec. 16 **PAPA M**, the latest fascinating incarnation of guitarist David Pajo. Dec. 17: A night of funky jazz with **GROOVE COLLECTIVE**, a genre-bending outfit that's backed everyone from rapper Tupac Shakur to singer Natalie Merchant. . . . The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 17: The heartland devil **BOBBY CONN** does the pop Antichrist act ten thousand times better than his more famous counterpart, Marilyn Manson. Conn is saved by his sense of humor, his charisma, and his broad musical interests—last year he put out "Rise Up," a rock opera about the apocalypse, and he's just released the EP "Llovessonngs," which includes a cover of the Badfinger hit "Without You."

LIFE, 158 Bleecker St. (420-1999)—Dec. 15: Rock legend **RONNIE SPECTOR**, whose recent disk on the Kill Rock Stars label, "She Talks to Rainbows," shows that she still has solid pipes, holds her very own Christmas spectacular, with former punk turned Santa **JOEY RAMONE** and guests.

MAKOR, 35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—Dec. 21: An evening with Woodstock veteran (and sometime jingle singer) **RICHIE HAVENS**.

MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Dec. 16-17: **ZEN TRICKSTERS**, the erstwhile Grateful Dead cover band, has now embarked on its own strange trip of improvisational jams.

MERCURY LOUNGE, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 17: **PAPA M** (see Irving Plaza). Dec. 21: Transplanted British guitarist and songwriter **FRANCIS DUNNERY**.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Dec. 15: The **DAVE BRUBECK** quartet rolls in, fifty years to the day from the opening of this club (on Broadway at 52nd Street). There may never be a critical consensus on the work of pianist and composer Brubeck, but at least he's lived and prospered long enough to cry about it all the way to the bank. It seems that his suc-



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cesses in the fifties left a permanent imprint on the jazz scene—two decades after the death of Brubeck's star soloist, saxophonist Paul Desmond (who had actually left the band before his death), fans still thrill to the merest suggestion of the irregular rhythms and lilting lyricism of Desmond's "Take 5," the band's unlikely 1959 hit single. Dec. 16-18: **"THE THREE JAZZ TENORS."** In the same way that the legendary triumvirate of tenor saxophonists Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, and Al Cohn found voices in their adoration of Lester Young, so **JOE LOVANO**, **MICHAEL BRECKER**, and **DAVE LIEBMAN** have forged their own sounds from the model of John Coltrane. Lovano's the brainiest, Liebman the most passionate, and Brecker the technician, but ascribed roles have a way of dissolving when such skillful players get together. Dining.

CD NOTES: MUSIC BOXES

Sometimes buying a boxed set feels like cheating, as if you had not come honestly by your ownership of, say, the complete Deep Purple or Sammy Davis, Jr. (no kidding). On the other hand, the new Stevie Wonder box, **AT THE CLOSE OF A CENTURY** (Motown; \$60), is a good purchase, but, at just four disks, it doesn't do quite enough to replace that old stack of Stevie LPs moldering in the closet. The new Grateful Dead set, **SO MANY ROADS** (1965-1995) (Arista; \$80), comes in a pristine white cloth package and seems to promise a completeness that's not really there; the truly great Dead box will come when all the many "Dick's Picks" disks—still tricky to find—come out under one lid.

And yet it seems, especially in gift season, peevish to moan about the deficiencies of the boxed set. The offerings this Christmas feature, above all, some extraordinary moments in jazz. Verve has put out an eight-disk package of all its studio recordings of **LESTER YOUNG** (\$144). Pres was the ultimate virtuoso hipster, and his Verve recordings begin with his bassless trio recordings in 1946, with Buddy Rich on drums and Nat (King) Cole on piano (listen to Young tear through "Somebody Loves Me" with his sidemen in fast pursuit), and they take him to his end, in 1959. It's only in those last despairing sessions in Paris, when Young knew he was dying, that



his breath begins to fail him on "Oh, Lady, Be Good!" which he first recorded in 1936.

Two centennials have led to a pair of great boxed sets. First, and rather modest, is **YOU'RE SENSATIONAL: COLE PORTER IN THE '20s, '40s & '50s** (Koch; \$50), which features everything from Marlene Dietrich singing "You Do Something to Me" from "Fifty Million Frenchmen" to that sublime duo of Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster collaborating on "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To" from the 1943 film "Something to Shout About." There is no competition at all, not in any genre, for the boxed set of the year. With the RCA Victor twenty-four-disk **CENTENNIAL EDITION**, the hundredth anniversary of Duke Ellington's birth is celebrated with real honor. The set begins with a recording of "If You Can't Hold the Man

You Love" in 1927 and ends with the orchestra playing "Creole Love Call" in 1973 with lingering passion. In the liner notes, Stanley Crouch supposes that Ellington's "fifty years of development constitute what is perhaps the single most comprehensive evolution in all of American art." After listening to it all—the miniatures and the suites, the blues and the sacred concerts—it's hard to disagree. At \$407, this set is an expensive proposition, but it gives you the musical heart of the American century.

through hoops or extracting melodies from his arsenal of tuned conch shells, Turre is a lusty improviser who's been a welcome presence on the bandstand since his days with Rahsaan Roland Kirk in the mid-seventies. Dining. **UP OVER JAZZ CAFE**, 351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Dec. 17-18: The **JOHN HICKS/ELISE WOOD** quartet. The combination of Hicks's fulsome piano and Wood's delicate flute seems unlikely to make beautiful music, but this occasional team has been subverting expectations for years now. Dec. 19: **CECIL PAYNES'S SEVENTY-SEVENTH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION**. The veteran bop-era baritone saxophonist Payne is still hale and hearty and will have a snappy rhythm section featuring pianist **RONNIE MATTHEWS** and drummer **JOE STRASSER**.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Dec. 19: The **CEDAR WALTON** quartet. In what has become an eagerly anticipated yearly event, pianist Walton is joined by premier jazz drummer **BILLY HIGGINS** and the iconic alto saxophonist **JACKIE MCLEAN**; together these old buddies will make the walls of this venerable jazz club sweat. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Only the Best: Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon" is home to eighty works, including paintings by Rubens, Fragonard, Turner, and Manet, while their permanent residence undergoes renovation. Through Feb. 27. . . .

¶ "Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch" offers forty paintings and ninety-two drawings of the nineteenth-century French elite. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ "Carleton Watkins: The Art of Perception" presents more than a hundred and twenty-five images by this pioneer of photography, who recorded the vastness of the American West. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," a sombre and ravishing survey of five hundred years of the millennia of Egyptian dynasties, covers the Old Kingdom (2650-2150 B.C.), the glorious formative period of Pharaonic art when the great pyramids were built and religious statuary rose to a refined naturalism. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Icons of Rock Style," at the Costume Institute. Through March 19. . . . ¶ "Daido Moriyama: Hunter," an exhibition of forty photographs made in postwar Japan. Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Modern Starts" comprises three shows featuring works drawn from MOMA's permanent collection, all focussed on the years 1880-1920. "People" runs through Feb. 1; "Places" and "Things" through March 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—A retrospective devoted to the Neapolitan painter Francesco Clemente presents more than two hundred paintings, frescoes, watercolors, pastels, sculptures, illustrations, and collaborative works. Through Jan. 9. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Part two of "The American Century" is dedicated to works made from 1950 to the present, as American art gathered steam after the Second World War. Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—*National Geographic* meets the East Village in "Body Art: Marks of Identity," which features Pre-Colombian nose ornaments from Peru beside contemporary photographs of the pierced and tattooed natives of New York and San Francisco. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Eastman Johnson: Painting America." Through Feb. 6. . . . ¶ "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection." Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—Kaiser Wilhelm II was a notorious killjoy, but the era named after him saw a giddy efflorescence of artistic, theatrical, and literary innovation, admirably surveyed in "Berlin Metropolis: Jews and the New Culture, 1880-1914." German Jews, excluded from government, the military, and the universities, played a major role in these developments, from the Berlin Secession of 1899 to the beginning of the film industry. There's a lot here (more than two hundred and fifty objects are on display, from paintings, posters, and film clips to vitrines full of memorabilia), but curator Emily D. Bilski has kept urban sprawl in check by focussing

CHARLES BARSOITI

CARLYLE HOTEL, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle features, through Dec. 31, **BOBBY SHORT**. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance through Jan. 1.

IRIDIUM, 48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 19: The **RON CARTER** quintet. As long as Carter sticks to his regular instrument, the full-size acoustic bass, all is well; when he turns to the mutant piccolo bass (his own invention), we're in trouble. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL**.

KNITTING FACTORY, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 15: Singer **NORA YORK**'s clever confections of iconic pop, jazz, gospel, and what-have-you are ingenious, but her affecting originals are what truly expose the quirky strength of this extravagant talent. Dec. 16-19: Free improvisation is the word when saxophonist **TIM BERNE** is joined by bassist **DREW GRESS** and drummer **TOM RAINEY**, two inspiring players who can also be seen with Fred Hersch's superb trio. Dec. 18-19: **ROSCOE MITCHELL'S NOTE FACTORY**. The saxophonist and composer Mitchell was the most cerebral member of the now defunct Art Ensemble of Chicago; his work navigates the uncharted seas of new jazz, new classical, and

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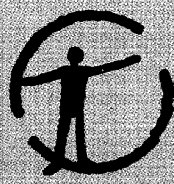


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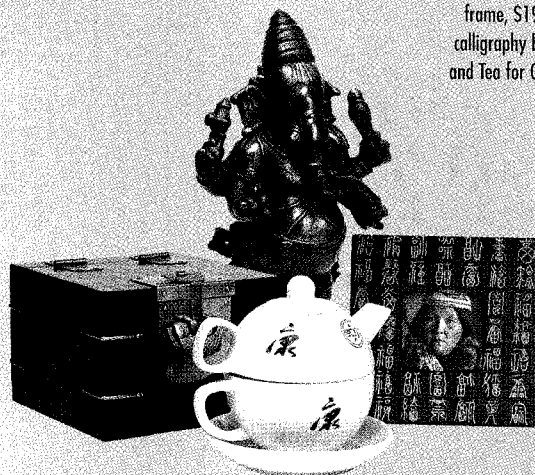
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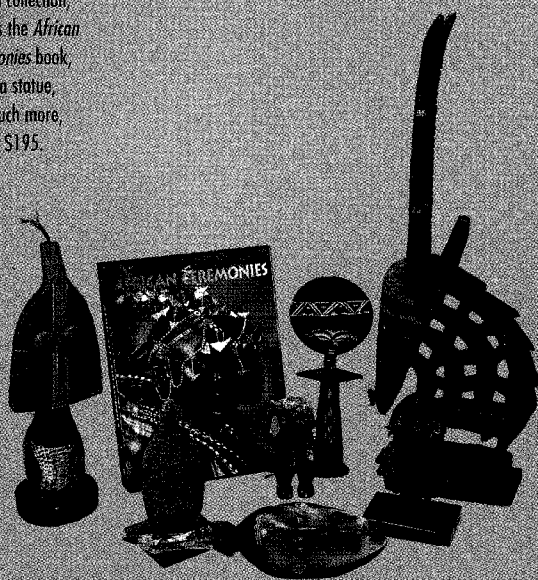
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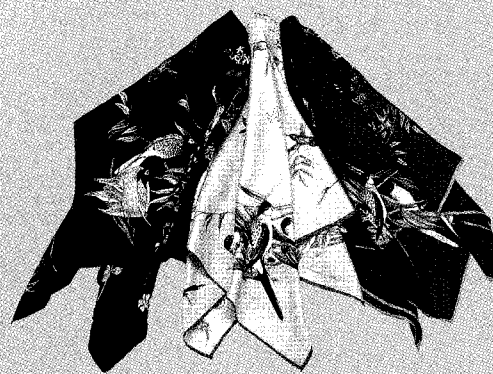
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on the lives of a few prominent individuals such as Max Liebermann, Herwaldt Walden, and Ernst Lubitsch. There are a few odd gaps (only one painting by the young Max Beckmann?), but this is a festive, cogent show. Through April 23. . . . "John Singer Sargent: Portraits of the Wertheimer Family." Through Feb. 6. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY, 29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—"The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic" marks the bicentennial of G.W.'s death with a dry-as-zwieback show that traces our first President's development from royal surveyor to revolutionary to republican. A hundred documents, including manuscripts, letters, maps, and rare books, are amassed in vitrines; among the highlights are a first printing of the Declaration of Independence and a signed letter from George III conceding defeat. Granted, this is a library, but the preponderance of documents leaves one champing at the bit for a set of wooden teeth. Through Jan. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5; Fridays, 10:30 to 8; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

THE NEW MUSEUM, 583 Broadway (219-1222)—If you associate interactivity with the glow of your computer screen, then this retrospective of works by the influential Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles will be an eye-opening—not to mention sock-and-shoe-removing—experience. "Red Shift" is a three-room installation created in response to Brazil's reign of terror in the late sixties. It ends with a sink askew on a wall, its tap flowing red—theatricality overblown to the point of melodrama. More effective is the poetic, frightening "Volatile," which takes you barefoot (follow instructions, please) through a darkened J-shaped chamber lit by a single flame and filled with several tons of gray talc and the smell of natural gas. Through March 5. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

GREGORY GILLESPIE—Visitors who have seen the artist's triumphant retrospective at M.I.T.'s List Center (it remains on view through Jan. 4, and then travels to Youngstown, Ohio) will be puzzled by the thirty small paintings here. Painted on wood, glass, and a tree stump, they display none of the mesmerizing verisimilitude for which Gillespie is best known. Instead, these mandalas, landscapes, and sexualized doodles glow with bright, casually brushed color, as if Gillespie, after years of working with a magnifying glass and triple-zero brushes, had suddenly decided to become a late-blooming modernist. Often, the new works suggest a debt to Howard Hodgkin, probably the last artist one would have thought to associate with Gillespie. Through Dec. 31. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

SHORT LIST—**EDGAR DEGAS**, Mathes, 41 E. 57th St. 752-5135. Through Dec. 24. . . . **CILDO MEIRELES**, Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Jan. 15. . . . **RICHARD SERRA**, Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through Jan. 14. (See also Chelsea Short List.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MIKE COCKRILL—Why would these schoolgirls, with their pigtails, leotards, and handguns, want to execute a bunch of defenseless male clowns? Perhaps because this talented but desperate-for-attention painter simply hasn't thought of a better gimmick. What Cockrill does well—almost too well—is handle a brush: he paints the girls' skinny limbs and bright clothing with a loose-wristed agility that borders on the show-offy. In the

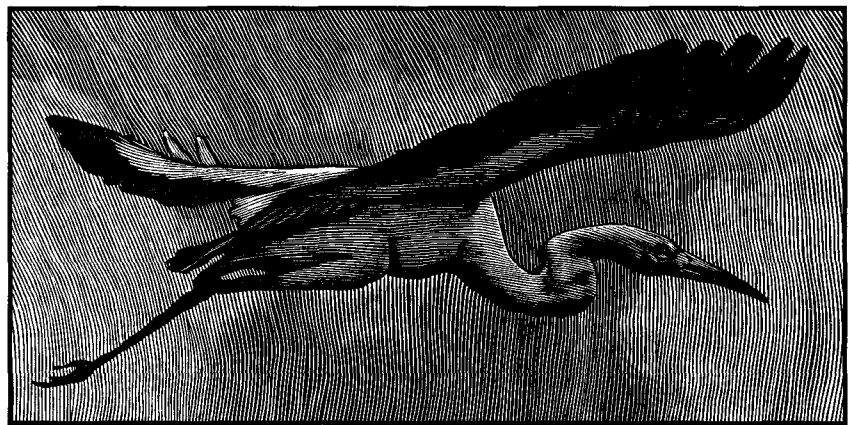
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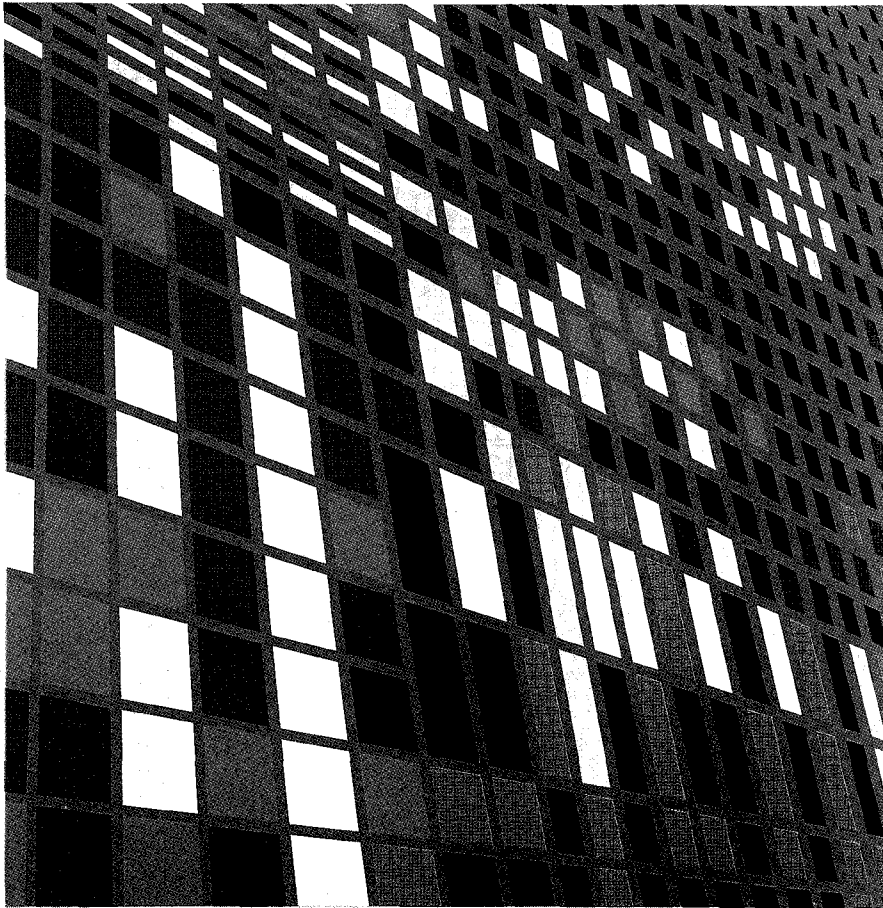
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"Midtown—Crowne Plaza Hotel," by Sarah Morris, at Petzel.

service of believable subject matter, Cockrill's skill might be genuinely enticing; instead, these images seem semi-provocative, like a society portraitist's version of Helmut Newton. Through Dec. 24. (Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 299-0044.)

JIM TOROK—On the way to the feast of the Ingres show, the tiny portraits here would make a terrific *amuse-gueule*. Torok's depictions of his friends (mostly other artists in their thirties) can't match the idiosyncratic idealization of Ingres's sitters, but they do have a crisp, distilled clarity that the French perfectionist would have grudgingly admired. The subject of "CarolAnn Wachter," with her center-parted dark hair, level stare, and lipstick-red dress, could be a lean, latter-day Madame Moitessier. Through Dec. 23. (Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.)

SHORT LIST—**ANNE CHU**, AC Project Room, 453 W. 17th St. 645-4970. Through Jan. 15. ... **TONY FEHER**, D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through Dec. 23. ... **MARTIN HONERT**, Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through Dec. 24. ... **LARI PITTMAN**, Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300. Through Dec. 23. ... **RICHARD SERRA**, Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111. Through Feb. 26. (See also Uptown Short List.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

BARBARA BLOOM—"A Birthday Party for Everything." Open the door to this intimate gallery and you'll swear somebody yelled "Surprise!" when you catch a glimpse of this charming installation in a gift box: A dozen balloons hover over a table set for twelve. White plates, cups, napkins, and party hats and favors are all emblazoned with carbon-paper-blue imagery, ranging from the microcosmic (pencils printed with chromosomes) to the macrocosmic (a paddle and ball depicting the solar system). The whole spread fits into a ledger-size box,

multiples of which are on sale. Through Dec. 23. (Inglett, 100 Wooster St. 343-0573.)

SARAH MORRIS—Dazzlingly slick variations on the time-honored grid theme, by way of glass skyscraper façades reflecting neon in Times Square. The artist is as influenced by the commercial as much as the art historical; the checkerboard logo of Ralston Purina pops to mind, and so does the precision of Ralston Crawford. There is a sense of velocity, even vertigo, in the angled compositions, and the keyed-up color of the glossy house paints is exhilarating. Check out the Pucci palette of charcoal, pink, orange, and moss green in "Midtown—Crowne Plaza Hotel." Through Dec. 18. (Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466.)

SHORT LIST—**RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER**, Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through Dec. 18. ... **GORDON MATTA-CLARK**, Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through Dec. 24.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

PETER HILDEBRAND—Caked-on, nearly mortared paintings using tar, joint compound, latex, and enamel paint. Hildebrand's interconnected imagery—pipelines, barrels, bomb casings, and factory architecture—offers pessimistic visions of precarious industrial-biological hybrids. "Tripping Balzac" presents a Tower of Babel-like scaffold, as complex in its Baroque interconnections as it is obsolete-looking. Hildebrand presents entropic technologies as organisms, purposely scarifying the canvases with pavementlike cracks and rust discolorations—imagine Hieronymous Bosch on the New Jersey Turnpike. Through Dec. 20. (Pierogi 2000, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

"CONCEPTUALISATIONISM"—A witty, smart-alecky group exhibition exploring a new generation's take on a fundamental "ism" of the past half-century. Tackling Conceptualism head on, several of the show's ten artists update the idea-based work of more famous

practitioners: Jack Balas's collages of art-magazine advertisements into which the artist inserts his name recall similar provocations by Hans Haacke; Julie Shafer's thrown sculpture in spun sugar brings to mind Richard Serra's experiments in flinging molten lead. Other intriguing works include Jesse Bercowetz's peripatetic exhibition in a trench coat; Leonardo Riley's cinematic portrait photographs; and David Lowe's audiotaped proof of his own existence. Fresh, lower-case conceptualism for the post-manifesto era. Through Dec. 27. (Star 67, at 67 Metropolitan Ave. 718-599-7339.)

LAURIE HOGIN and JONATHAN WAHL—Hogin's allegorical pictures of a poisoned utopia feature monkeys, snarling bunnies, and shark-toothed birds of paradise. Using seductive Flemish painting techniques and an elegant Ingres-like fastidiousness, Hogin encases her toxic-colored bestiary in frames made of thick wood and gold paint. Wahl, working in a similarly revisionist vein, presents tabletop bronze sculptures and prints of cowboys atop bucking unicorns. Wahl departs from Frederic Remington's version of the taming of American Arcadia to create a bizarre never-never land where the mythical rider can be impaled on his fantastical ride. Through Jan. 10. (Momenta Art, 72 Berry St. 718-218-8058.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S—Dec. 15: Russian art works and objects of vertu. ... ¶ Dec. 17: Fine Oriental and European carpets. ... ¶ Dec. 18: Collectible movie posters; also, a "Collectors' Carousel" auction of all sorts of potential Christmas gifts, from Beatles autographs to a 1978 Checker Cab. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S—An auction of fine rugs and carpets. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000. Dec. 16.) ... At **CHRISTIE'S EAST**: Dec. 16: Books. ... ¶ Dec. 20-21: Western Americana. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

PHILLIPS—Jewelry. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830. Dec. 15.)

DOYLE—Fine furniture, decorative pieces, and paintings, including pieces from the estate of the late choreographer Jerome Robbins; also, an auction of holiday gift possibilities such as Wedgwood ceramics and Waterford glassware. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. Dec. 15.)

SWANN—Maps and atlases, decorative graphics, and ephemera. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Dec. 16.)

GUERNSEY'S—A one-lot auction looses on the market a necklace and a pair of earrings created in 1997 as a suite for the Princess of Wales. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Dec. 16. For information, call 794-2280.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

"AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS, PART 3"—The final installment in James Danziger's trilogy of blue-chip shows includes work by Irving Penn, Cindy Sherman, Adam Fuss, Sally Mann, Richard Avedon, and others. Through Dec. 24. (Danziger, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 734-5300.)

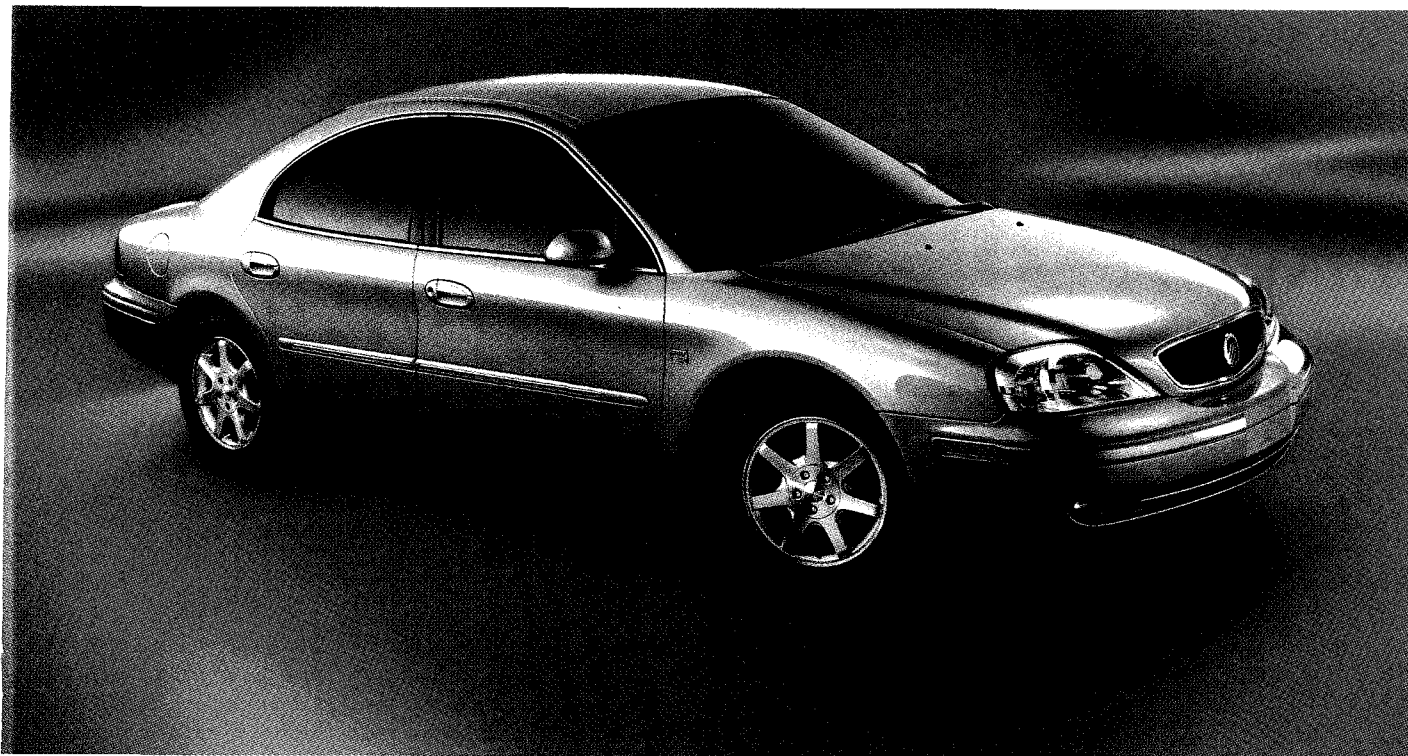
"ANCIENT HISTORY: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, 1851-1996"—Images of monuments, ruins, pictographs, and more, by such artists as Linda Connor, Lynn Davis, Louis de Clercq, Laura Gilpin, Richard Misrach, Andrew Moore, Felix Teynard, and Tseng Kwong Chi. Through Jan. 15. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

"EARTH FROM ABOVE"—A delightful series of large color photographs by the French aerial photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand, taken while flying over more than sixty countries. Through Jan. 29. (Science, Industry, and Business Library, New York Public Library, Madison Ave. at 34th St. 869-8089.)

GROUP SHOW—Recent works by Marianne Courville, Meghan Gerety, and Alexandra Rowley. Through Jan. 15. (Grimm, 505 W. 28th St. 564-7662. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 7.)

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INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY—"Propaganda and Dreams: Photographing the 1930s in the USSR and the US." Through Feb. 13. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

HOLIDAY EXHIBITIONS—Really just a fun excuse to head uptown and grab some photographic gifts, many of them moderately priced. At **ALAN KLOTZ/PHOTOCOLLECT** there are images by biggies like Nadar, Stieglitz, Steichen, Coburn, and Strand alongside vernacular pictures by Anonymous. Through Dec. 23. (22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 7.) ... **DE LELLIS** has works by, among others, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Doris Ulmann, and W. Eugene Smith. Through Dec. 24. (47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.)

SHORT LIST—**TINA BARNEY**, Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Dec. 18. ... **JAYNE HINDS BIDAUT** and **LARRY GIANETTINO**, Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Both shows through Jan. 15. ... **BRASSAI**, Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through Jan. 8. ... **DAVID BUTOW**, Saba, 116 E. 16th St. 477-7722. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays; through Jan. 6. ... **ELAINE LUSTIG COHEN** and **DIDIER MASSARD**, Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Both shows through Jan. 15. ... **JOHN COPLANS**, Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Through Jan. 15. ... **JOHN DUGDALE**, Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through Jan. 9. ... **TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS**, Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Dec. 18. ... **ANDREAS GURSKY**, Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200. Through Jan. 15. ... **HIRO**, Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through Jan. 15. ... **PETER MILLER** and **CATHERINE LEUTHOLD**, Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; both shows through Jan. 15. ... **RUTH ORKIN**, Greenberg, 560 Broadway. 334-0010. Through Jan. 22. ... **RENÉ-JACQUES**, Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Jan. 22. ... **ANDREA ROBBINS** and **MAX BECHER**, Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450. Through Jan. 29. ... **DENNIS STOCK**, Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Jan. 22. ... **THOMAS STRUTH**, Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Dec. 31. ... **JERRY UELSMANN**, Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Dec. 24.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for the Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St., 570-3949.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

HANDEL'S "MESSIAH"—It was written for performance at Easter, of course, but over the years this oratorio has drifted across the calendar and put down roots at Christmastime. Among the airings this week—all employing a full orchestra—are performances by the **MUSICA SACRA** chorus and orchestra, with soprano Judith Pannill, mezzo-soprano Marietta Simpson, tenor John Aler, and baritone William Sharp, directed by Richard Westenburg (Avery Fisher Hall; Dec. 15 and Dec. 20 at 8); the **ST. THOMAS CHOIR** and the period-instrument orchestra **CONCERT ROYAL**, with soprano Julianne Baird, countertenor Drew Minter, tenor Mark Bleeke, and bass Nathaniel Watson, directed by Gerre Hancock (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St.; 664-9360; Dec. 16 at 7:30); the **MANHATTAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA AND CHOIR OF SACRED MUSIC**, directed by Robert Prior and performing the Christmas portion only, coupled with Saint-Saëns's "Christmas Oratorio," among other works (Church of the Holy Innocents,

128 W. 37th St.; Dec. 17 at 7:30; no tickets necessary); the **NATIONAL CHORALE**, with Martin Josman directing (Avery Fisher Hall; Dec. 17 at 8); the **ORATORIO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK**, directed by Lyndon Woodside (Carnegie Hall; Dec. 20 at 8); and the **MASTERWORK CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA**, David Briskin directing (Carnegie Hall; Dec. 21 at 8); as well as Concordia Orchestra's blow-the-roof-



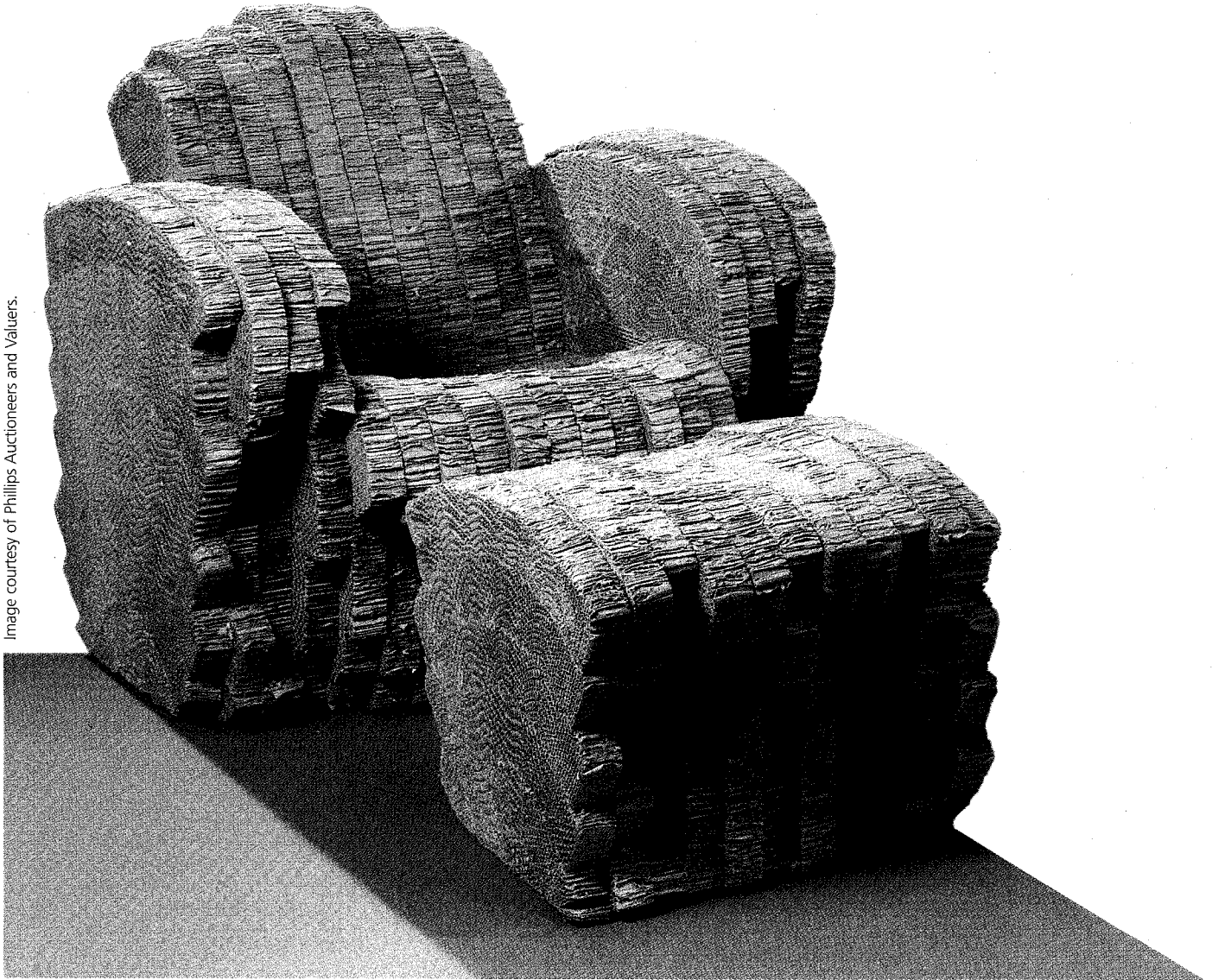
BUSHELS OF BACH: *Ton Koopman's obsession with Bach is understandable: he was trained as an organist and harpsichordist—he holds the Amsterdam Conservatory's Prix d'Excellence in both—and Bach stands at the summit of those instruments' repertoires. Koopman's often capricious interpretations of Bach's keyboard music had already won him a following by the time he founded the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, in 1979. He's now guiding that crackjack period-instrument group, plus its choir and soloists, through recordings of all two hundred and fifteen of Bach's cantatas (on the Erato label), and he recently finished his traversal of the master's complete organ works (on sixteen Teldec CDs). All this makes him a perfect choice for launching Lincoln Center's four-month-long Bach festival with four of the composer's "Christmas Oratorio" cantatas, which he will lead at Avery Fisher Hall on December 19. The occasion marks the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary, in 2000, of Bach's death.*

off pop-and-jazz version, called **TOO HOT TO HANDEL**, returning for its sixth year under the baton of Marin Alsop, with vocal soloists Lillias White, Vivian Cherry, and Rod Dixon and the Morgan State University Choir (Avery Fisher Hall; Dec. 21 at 8). **CAROLLING**—Dec. 17 at 7: The members of the West Village Chorale and anyone who cares to join them wend their way through the streets of Greenwich Village. (Meet at

TONY MILLONARE

This should put you at ease with the internet.

Image courtesy of Phillips Auctioneers and Valuers.



It's made of cardboard. It's Frank O. Gehry's Little Beaver armchair and ottoman.

It was recently offered at auction by Phillips New York. Had you placed a bid, you could be relaxing in it now.

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St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St.; for more information, call 570-7301.) ... ¶ Dec. 19 at 7: A carol fest with I Cantori di New York. (St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St. Tickets at the door.)

ANONYMOUS 4—The women's vocal quartet presents medieval chant, polyphony, and readings that illuminate the life of St. Nicholas of Patara (or of Patras, some say), who in later centuries would evolve in popular hagiography into "Jolly Old Saint Nicholas." (Medieval Court, Metropolitan Museum. Dec. 15 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

GABRIELI CONSORT & PLAYERS—This leading English ensemble, directed by Paul McCreesh, presents a re-creation of Michael Praetorius's "Mass for Christmas Morning" as it might have sounded at a large German Lutheran church in about 1620. Music by Samuel Scheidt and Johann Hermann Schein joins Praetorius's polychoral centerpiece, and the Desoff Symphonic Choir adds its eighty-five voices for several sections. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. Dec. 16 at 8. For information about tickets, call 800-627-0655.)

WESTERN WIND VOCAL ENSEMBLE—Offering Hanukkah and Christmas music. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. Dec. 17 at 8. For information about tickets, call 873-2848.)

CHOIRS AND ORCHESTRA OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA—Kent Tritle directs Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols," Vivaldi's "Gloria," several Renaissance motets, and numerous carol arrangements (with plenty of opportunity for audience participation). (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Dec. 18 at 3 and Dec. 19 at 4.)

BARNARD-COLUMBIA CHORUS—Gail Archer leads the singers and an instrumental ensemble from the Manhattan School of Music in a candlelit concert comprising Britten's "Festival Te Deum" and "St. Nicholas Cantata," Bach's Cantata No. 1 ("Wie Schön Leuchtet der Morgenstern"), and Respighi's "Laud to the Nativity." (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, enter at Broadway and 116th St. Dec. 18 at 8. For information about tickets, call 854-5096.)

NEW YORK'S ENSEMBLE FOR EARLY MUSIC—Frederick Renz directs two separate programs twice each. Dec. 18 at 8 and Dec. 19 at 3: Medieval Christmas songs and carols, both sacred and secular. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 116th St. 280-0330.) ... ¶ Dec. 21 at 6:30 and 8:30: Renaissance Christmas music. (Medieval Court, Metropolitan Museum.)

WAVELY CONSORT—The early-music group, directed by Michael Jaffe, recounts the Christmas story through medieval vocal and instrumental music. (The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 650-2280. Dec. 19 at 1 and 3. ... ¶ Medieval Court, Metropolitan Museum. Dec. 20 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

BRASS BLOWOUT—The Canadian Brass and five principal brass players from the New York Philharmonic come together for a program of arrangements, many with a holiday slant. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 19 at 2.)

LIONHEART—The American men's vocal sextet offers a recital of medieval English Christmas music. Presented by Music Before 1800. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Dec. 19 at 4.)

"THE PAGEANT OF THE HOLY NATIVITY"—The St. Bart's Players and several of the choirs of St. Bartholomew's Church offer their annual presentation of this musical dramatic work, with a score by Anthony Piccolo. (Park Ave. at 50th St. Dec. 19 at 5. No tickets necessary.)

CALVARY CHAMBER SINGERS—Harry Huff directs the ensemble (from Calvary Episcopal Church) in seasonal works ranging from Renaissance motets to jazz. (Medieval Court, Metropolitan Museum. Dec. 19 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

AMSTERDAM BAROQUE ORCHESTRA AND CHOIR—Ton Koopman directs (from the keyboard) the first four cantatas of Bach's "Christmas Oratorio," with soprano Lisa Larsson, con-

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Visions of Caviar

DURING the holiday season, party invitations can pile up faster than a snowdrift against a New England woodpile. This flurry of social activity presents a small challenge: finding the right gift for each of your hosts. By going the gustatory route—sweet or savory, simple or exotic—you might add to the success of the party; at the very least, there'll be one item on the table that you'll enjoy.

fresh strawberries, mousseline cream, and a thin layer of marzipan (\$19), and Trianon, an otherworldly concoction of flourless chocolate cake, chocolate mousse, and praline truffle (\$23).

You can offer the gift of health by arriving with green tea from **THE TEA BOX**, at **TAKASHIMAYA** (693 Fifth Ave.; 350-0100). A slender cannister of Celestial Peach Ball tea (\$25) opens to reveal a dozen or so paper-wrapped spheres of long



DI PALO'S FINE FOODS (206 Grand St.; 226-1033), a seventy-four-year-old landmark in Little Italy, has just received a shipment of dried figs from a small farm in Calabria. A traditional Italian holiday gift, these figs come in small baskets (\$6) and are presented either unadorned, stuffed with almonds, or dipped in chocolate. The shop also sells chunky slabs of winter Parmesan cheese (\$10.49 a pound), so named because it's ready to eat at this time of year and is whiter in color and sweeter (due to the cows' winter diet of dried alfalfa) than other Parmesans. *Novello* olive oil, also called Christmas oil, is fresh and sharp and right off the press—the bottles are dated November, 1999. Luigi Di Palo, a grandson of the shop's founders, speaks with the softness and patience of a village priest as he advises customers of the superiority of the newly arrived *Madeo novello* (\$13). Another traditional Italian gift is balsamic vinegar; according to Di Palo, the vinegar gets sweeter and more complex with age, just like a good friendship. A small bottle of forty-year-old balsamic (\$90) made by Giuseppe Giusti, one of the oldest producers in the world (it was founded in 1598), is as thick as molasses and nearly as sweet. Try it over ice cream.

There is plenty for the Christmas sweet tooth at **MARQUET PÂTISSERIE** (15 E. 12th St.; 229-9313), a cozy bakery in the Village. If French cuisine is on the party menu, pick up a traditional Continental treat, the *bûche de Noël* (\$35 for an eight-inch roll; \$45 for the twelve-inch). Other once-a-year indulgences include Marquet's *fraisier*, a vanilla cake with

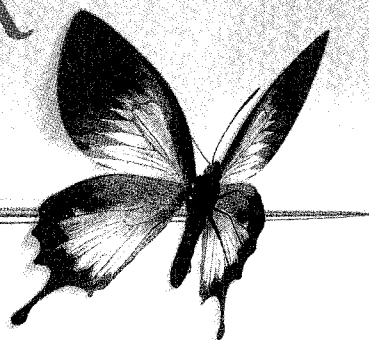
tea leaves. Drop one in a clear glass of just-boiling water and it slowly unfurls until it resembles an exotic flower. Other teas are available in a metal container modelled on traditional medicine tins and bearing the Japanese emperor's crest (\$12) or in a woven straw purse (\$18). A box of ultra-light Leaf Pie cookies (\$25), made from two hundred and fifty-six layers of pastry dough, is a good accompaniment. Or try the attractive—and tasty—Japanese vegetable cookies (\$35), which are inlaid with burdock leaf and lotus root. A box of amusingly realistic sushi candy (\$8) or a tin of cigars rolled from vanilla-butter dough (\$18) will provide a good laugh.

Mark Russ Federman, the proprietor of the venerable Lower East Side smoked-fish emporium **RUSS & DAUGHTERS** (179 E. Houston St.; 475-4880), reports that many of his customers are skipping big New Year's Eve celebrations and stocking up for intimate dinners with friends. "Lots of people will want to stay home with the TV and see if the set shuts down at midnight," Federman says. The first choice for the big night is—no surprise—caviar. Here you can splurge on a half-kilo of beluga (\$699), or save some money for extra *Veuve Clicquot* by going for an equal amount of osetra (\$399), a mild and delicate caviar that Federman says gives the sensation that "the sea has kissed your tongue." Braver souls can opt for the schmaltz herring (\$1.99 a fillet). "It's pure, unadulterated," Federman points out. "Take it with a little aquavit. It's practically an aphrodisiac."

—JOHN J. DONOHUE

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tralto Andreas Scholl, tenor Christoph Prégardien, and bass Klaus Mertens. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 19 at 7.)

THE VIRGIN CONSORT—Kyler Brown directs the eleven-voice vocal ensemble in Victoria's "O Magnum Mysterium" motet and Mass, as well as seasonal works by Poulenc, Virgil Thomson, and others. (St. Jean Baptiste Church, Lexington Ave. at 76th St. Dec. 21 at 8. For information about tickets, call 570-2130.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR**, with Ruth Ann Swenson, Ramón Vargas, Leo Nucci, and Michele Pertusi; conducted by Edoardo Müller. (Dec. 15 at 8 and Dec. 18 at 8:30.)... **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO**, with Amanda Roocroft, Barbara Bonney, Susanne Mentzer, Bo Skovhus, and Richard Bernstein; Edo de Waart. (Dec. 16 at 8.)... With Ildebrando D'Arcangelo instead of Mr. Bernstein. (Dec. 21 at 8.)... **L'ELISIR D'AMORE**, with Angela Gheorghiu, Roberto Alagna, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Paul Plishka; Evelino Pidò. (Dec. 17 at 8.)... **TRISTAN UND ISOLDE**, with Jane Eaglen, Katarina Dalayman, Ben Heppner, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, and René Pape; James Levine. (Dec. 18 at 12:30.)... The premiere of John Harbison's **THE GREAT GATSBY**, with Dawn Upshaw, Susan Graham, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Jerry Hadley, Mark Baker, Dwayne Croft, and Richard Paul Fink; Mr. Levine. (Dec. 20 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—At Avery Fisher Hall, André Previn conducting. Dec. 16 and Dec. 18 at 8 and Dec. 17 at 11 A.M.: Mozart's C-Major Piano Concerto (K. 467, with Alicia de Larrocha) and Act II of Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker."... ¶ Dec. 18 at 2: Act II of Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker," in addition to two chamber works played by Philharmonic musicians: the Ravel/Salzedo "Sonatine en Trio" for flute, cello, and harp (which the late harpist Carlos Salzedo arranged from Ravel's Sonatine for Piano) and Martinů's 1951 Serenade for Violin, Viola, Two Clarinets, and Cello.

JUPITER SYMPHONY—Jens Nygaard conducts an all-Beethoven benefit concert that includes the composer's Romance in F Major (with violinist Arturo Delmoni) and his Symphony No. 7. (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. 602-9632. Dec. 16 at 1. Tickets at the door.)

RIVERSIDE CHORAL SOCIETY AND ORCHESTRA—Patrick Gardner directs Haydn's "Harmoniemesse," Schubert's "Magnificat," and Beethoven's "Choral" Fantasy (with pianist Margaret Kampmeier). (Church of the Holy Trinity, 213 W. 82nd St. Dec. 18 at 8. For information about tickets, call 780-2181.)

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY—Anthony Newman serves as conductor and organ soloist in a program that comprises a group of Baroque "trumpet tunes" and "Water Music" suites by Handel and Telemann. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 18 at 8 and Dec. 19 at 2.)

ORCHESTRA OF THE S.E.M. ENSEMBLE—Petr Kotik is featured as the solo flutist in Bach's B-Minor Orchestral Suite and conducts the four remaining works on this program, by Jackson MacLow, Strauss (his "Metamorphosen"), Cage, and Feldman ("For Samuel Beckett"). (Paula Cooper gallery, 534 W. 21st St. Dec. 21 at 8. For information about tickets, call 718-488-7659.)

RECITALS

PERSPECTIVES ENSEMBLE—The instrumental group performs music by Turina, in a program that also includes reminiscences about him from conductor Angel Gil-Ordoñez and composer Joaquín Nin-Culmell. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, enter at Broadway and 116th St. Dec. 15 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

ARNOLD STEINHARDT—The first violinist of the Guarneri Quartet is joined by his brother, Victor (a pianist and composer), and his

daughter, Natasha (a soprano), in a recital that includes pieces by Lukas Foss, Amy Beach, Mozart, and others (including Steinhardt *frère*). (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. Dec. 15 at 8. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

BARGEMUSIC—Cellist Bion Tsang and pianist Mihae Lee perform Shostakovich's Cello Sonata; violinist Carmit Zori joins them for piano trios by Haydn (in D Major, Hob. XV/24) and Mendelssohn (in D Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Dec. 16 at 7:30 and Dec. 19 at 4.)

ROBERTO HIDALGO AND MARC PELOQUIN—The two pianists present a program of duets by twentieth-century Mexican and American composers: two movements from Chávez's ballet "HP," Carlos Sánchez Gutiérrez's "Calacas y Palomas," Copland's "El Salón México" (in Bernstein's arrangement), and Crumb's "Zeitgeist." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Dec. 16 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER—Performing all six of Bach's "Brandenburg" Concertos. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 16-17 at 8 and Dec. 19 at 5.)

BACHMANN-KLIBONOFF-FRIDMAN TRIO—The ensemble is joined by clarinetist David Krakauer for a concert of works by Poulenc, Bernstein, Milhaud, and others. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. Dec. 17 at 7.)

AMERICAN SAXOPHONE QUARTET—The ensemble plays works by Ramon Ricker, Albéniz, and Charlie Parker, as well as premières of works by Gabriel Senanes and Paquito D'Rivera (with the latter playing clarinet in his own piece). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Dec. 19 at 3.)

EUGENE LEVINSON—A recital by the principal double bassist of the New York Philharmonic, assisted at the piano by his wife, Gina Levinson. (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 20 at 8.)

CURIOS TRIO—Violinist and violist Toby Appel, percussionist Daniel Druckman, and pianist Jonathan Feldman perform (in various combinations) works by George Antheil, Lou Harrison, Henry Cowell, and Michael Colgrass, among others. (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 21 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

SEASONAL TRACKS—Phil Kline, composer and master of the tape recorder, leads an ad-hoc ensemble of boom-box-toting carollers—each playing a taped part of his work "Unsilent Night"—on a march through the streets of Greenwich Village. Those who bring their own boom box get to keep the tape. (Dec. 18 at 7, starting at the Washington Square Arch. For more information, call 227-6255.)

THE SOUNDS OF THE SOLSTICE—More than a dozen musicians dressed in kimonos play their *shakuhachis* (Japanese bamboo flutes), filling St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie with music celebrating the lengthening of the days, composed by James Nyoraku Schlefer. (Second Ave. at 10th St. Dec. 21 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

READINGS—Dec. 15 at 8: By Eliza Minot, from her novel, "The Tiny One." (Rocky Sullivan's, 129 Lexington Ave., at 29th St. No tickets necessary.)... ¶ Dec. 17 at 10:30: By Brian Blanchfield, Morris Kurzman, Douglas A. Martin, and other writers, in an evening titled "Night of Taboos Part II: Closet Cases, Addiction & Toilets." (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.)

TALKS—Dec. 15 at 6: Ecologist H. Bruce Rinker discusses the latest in forest-canopy walkways, the devices scientists use to observe life in the upper levels of the world's forests. (New York Academy of Sciences, 2 E. 63rd St. 838-0230.)... ¶ Dec. 20 at 8: Critics Harold Bloom and Frank Kermode talk about Shakespeare and his legacy. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

BOOK CURRENTS

British Reserves



It's strange how some first-rate writers disappear while others endure; stranger still how canny publishers can be in choosing which forgotten authors to resurrect from time to time. The New York Review of Books, for instance, has judiciously reprinted fifteen neglected masterpieces of fiction and nonfiction, including several by mid-century British writers who had slipped quietly away along with the England they depicted.

One of them is Sylvia Townsend Warner, whose 1926 novel, *Lolly Willowes*, pushes a familiar story to the edge of surrealism. After the death of her father, Lolly moves from the country to live in London with her brother's family. Twenty monotonous years later, she longs for the countryside and moves to rural Buckinghamshire. There she finds that her love of nature really masks a secret desire to be a witch, and she joins other villagers in delirious satanic rituals.

Turtle Point Press recently reprinted the *Collected Tales and Fantasies of Lord Berners*, an extravagant dilettante of the twenties and thirties whose real masterwork was his own eccentric persona. His stories take place in a halcyon world of country-house weekends and bohemian parties but are shot through with surreal touches hinting at tensions beneath the social façade. In one, Percy Wallingford, a pillar of the establishment who excels in everything, gradually goes insane when he realizes that his new wife can see in the dark and has been quietly observing his every private move.

J. R. Ackerley's semi-autobiographical novel, *We Think the World of You*, comes out in January from the New York Review. When Johnny, Frank's working-class lover, serves a brief prison sentence, Frank finds himself looking after Johnny's family and young Alsatian. Appalled by the family's mistreatment of the dog, he gives it needed exercise. Johnny finally gets out of prison only to find his dog in reasonable shape but no longer really his. As with many of these reprints, it seems eerily appropriate that this quietly told story of the lonely, the frustrated, and the forgotten should have come to suffer a similar fate.

Books.

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHS: THE MILESTONES

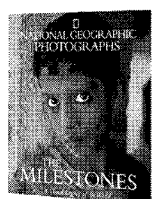
by Leah Bendavid-Val, ed., & Kim Heacox

National Geographic has had a dramatic impact on the history of photography and on our view of the world. Now, in this exquisite volume, a group of distinguished experts in the field of photography have collected +250 images to exemplify the artistic and technological milestones of the world-renowned magazine. (National Geographic Society)

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LIFE: OUR CENTURY IN PICTURES

by Richard Stolley & Tony Chiu

Richard Stolley, one of *Life* magazine's fabled editors, captures the full scope and dimension of the last one hundred years through the words of leading commentators and in over six hundred images drawn from the Time, Inc., vault. Experience the epic stories of war and peace, culture and celebrity, invention and inspiration that were the twentieth century. (Bulfinch)

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SISTER WENDY'S 1000 MASTERPIECES

by Sister Wendy Beckett

One of the most accessible and respected art critics of our time expounds on the greatest masterpieces of Western art. Sister Wendy's personal insights and perceptive annotations illuminate such landmark paintings as da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* and Velazquez's *The Waterseller of Seville*, as well as the works of over five hundred other renowned artists. Includes superb, full-color reproductions. (Dorling Kindersley)

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IF THIS HOUSE COULD TALK

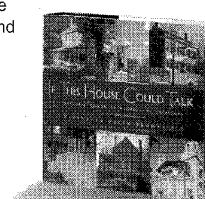
by Elizabeth Smith Brownstein

The American experience, from the struggle for independence to the desire to own it all, is reflected in the form and function of our homes. Smithsonian researcher Brownstein explores, in pictures and essays, the cultural significance of such places as Robert Frost's Farm, the Wukoki Pueblo, Underground Railroad houses, and the Hearst Castle. (Simon & Schuster)

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WOMEN

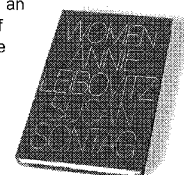
photos by Annie Leibovitz,
essay by Susan Sontag

Annie Leibovitz's ability to tap the essence of her subjects is never more apparent than in her personal portraits of Hillary Rodham Clinton, Eudora Welty, Jerry Hall, and other women—from a Navajo weaver to several Nobel Prize winners. Susan Sontag accompanies the images with an essay on how the definition of women has changed since the invention of photography. (Modern Library)

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NEW YORK: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

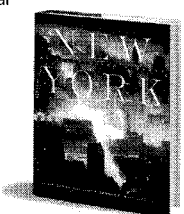
by Ric Burns & James Sanders with Lisa Ades

A companion to the twelve-hour PBS television series, this landmark volume brims with the energy and diversity of a city that has embodied human achievement, romance and power. Perceptive essays and historic illustrations reveal New York in all its glory and drama. (Knopf)

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OPENING

ANNA AND THE KING—A retelling of the late-nineteenth-century romance between Anna Leonowens, a British governess, and the King of Siam. With Jodie Foster and Chow Yun-Fat. Directed by Andy Tennant. Opening Dec. 17. (Chelsea Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

BICENTENNIAL MAN—An android (Robin Williams) strives to become fully human over a two-hundred-year period. Directed by Chris Columbus. Opening Dec. 17. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, 42nd Street E Walk, and Union Square.)

THE EMPEROR AND THE ASSASSIN—Chen Kaige directed this historical drama about the elaborate death plot against Ying Zheng, the king who became China's first emperor. With Gong Li and Li Xuejian. Cinematography by Zhao Fei. In Mandarin. Opening Dec. 17. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

GIRL, INTERRUPTED—Winona Ryder plays a seventeen-year-old girl consigned to an elite New England psychiatric hospital after an attempted suicide. With Whoopi Goldberg and Vanessa Redgrave. Directed by James Mangold. Opening Dec. 17.

MAGNOLIA—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 17.

STUART LITTLE—An adaptation of E. B. White's story of a mouse raised by the Littles, a human family. Directed by Rob Minkoff. Opening Dec. 17.

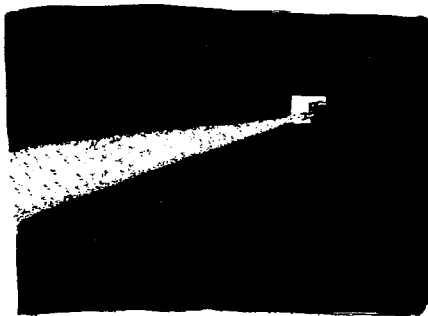
TOPSY-TURVY—The creative partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan is glimpsed through the 1885 production of their great comic opera "The Mikado." Written and directed by Mike Leigh. Opening Dec. 17. (Paris.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

BEING JOHN MALKOVICH—An out-of-work puppeteer (John Cusack) and his pet-loving girlfriend (Cameron Diaz) take turns entering the head of the actor John Malkovich, where they remain for fifteen minutes at a time, experiencing everything he does, before being deposited with a whoosh beside the New Jersey Turnpike. This fantastic weightless comedy, which was written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, plays with notions of celebrity worship and gender reversal, but the best thing about it is the genially deadpan style of its most absurd inventions. —David Denby (11/22/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE CIDER HOUSE RULES—The director Lasse Hallström has come to specialize in grownup movies about kids and teen-agers, especially of the luckless variety. This new picture, adapted by John Irving from his own novel, teems with scores of the little beggars; the tale begins at a snowbound or-



THE MOVIES

phanage in Maine, where Dr. Larch (Michael Caine) tends to the bodies and souls of the unwanted, even extending his skills to an illegal abortion practice. His protégé is Homer Wells (Tobey Maguire), who is set to follow in Larch's footsteps until those of Candy (Charlize Theron) appear. Homer departs for the wide world, where he learns about apples and sex, in that order. As an older and wiser man he returns to his destiny, although the getting of that wisdom has been oddly unengaging. The orphan scenes have an imaginative solidity that fades as the film proceeds, and you can't work out whether the gruelling social issues, like incest and abortion, are the subject of the movie or simply ballast. As apple movies go, this one lacks a core. —Anthony Lane (12/13/99) (Angelika Film Center, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

CRADLE WILL ROCK—In 1937, Orson Welles and John Houseman tried—and, just barely, succeeded—in putting on Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock," a musical drama about prostitutes, unions, and a lot of other things that musicals were never meant to mention. Tim Robbins's picture—his most crowded, and probably his best to date—tells the story, or the interlocking stories, of that super-charged age. Houseman (Cary Elwes) and Welles (Angus Macfadyen) are merely part of the procession; we also get the saga of Nelson Rockefeller (John Cusack) paying Diego Rivera (Ruben Blades) to paint a giant mural and then having it destroyed. As if in homage to that lost work, Robbins operates on the mural principle, moving gaily and with high technical fluency from penniless actors (John Turturro and Emily Watson) to sincere socialites like Countess La Grange (Vanessa Redgrave) and a ravishing Fascist named Margherita Sarfatti (Susan Sarandon). It could have been a mess, and there are patches where Robbins's inspiration wears a little thin; yet, all in all, his ambitious tolerance pays off, and you are happy to be hauled toward the grand—and unashamedly theatrical—finale. With Joan Cusack and Bill Murray as bashful anti-Communists, Hank Azaria as Blitzstein, and—best of all—Cherry Jones as Hallie Flanagan, the smiling mainstay of the Federal Theatre in its darkest hour. —A.L. (12/13/99) (Angelika Film Center, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

DOGMA—Kevin Smith, lord of the zero budget ("Clerks," "Chasing Amy"), has decided to stretch himself with this sprawling, star-stuffed fantasy on the trifling theme of good and evil. His unlikely plot features Matt

Damon and Ben Affleck as a couple of renegade angels who spot a chance to reënter heaven and thus terminate the universe. Up against them is a rank of supernatural forces—played by Alan Rickman, Chris Rock, Jason Lee, and Salma Hayek—a perplexed earthling (Linda Fiorentino), and a couple of unwitting prophets, played by the grungy Jason Mewes and the bearded Smith himself, back by popular demand from his previous pictures. The result has some great lines, but it's a muddle that turns into a mess; there have been cries of distress about the film's attack on organized religion, but no self-respecting church could seriously claim to be damaged by this extended skit. With Alanis Morissette as God. —A.L. (11/15/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, 59th Street East Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

THE END OF THE AFFAIR—Adultery during the blitz, with rain and gray ash everywhere and buildings falling down around the furtive lovers. Neil Jordan's adaptation of Graham Greene's novel "The End of the Affair" is suitably intense and sombre. The picture has an arrowlike swiftness and seriousness, and a good part of Greene's bracing candor comes through. But Greene's story, by its very nature, cannot explode into dramatic life on



Opening Dec. 17, Mike Leigh's new film, "Topsy-Turvy," re-creates the original production of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera "The Mikado."



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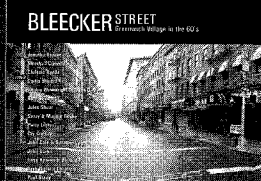
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the screen. The principal players are the writer Maurice Bendrix (Ralph Fiennes), a stand-in for Greene himself; a married woman, Sarah (Julianne Moore); and God, who is ever so hard to cast. Bendrix addresses Him, with elaborate loathing, and Sarah needs Him, but exactly what faith means to her is a mystery. The movie is constructed like a puzzle with a metaphysical solution—it's intelligent but muffled and slightly remote. Stephen Rea gives an abashed, beautiful performance as the cuckolded husband, and Ian Hart is the Dickensian detective who spies on everyone.—*D.D.* (12/6/99) (Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

END OF DAYS—The trailers looked like trouble, and they didn't lie. Arnold Schwarzenegger's millennial "Omen" flick—the Devil comes to New York to mate with a virgin on New Year's Eve—looks and plays like left-over high-testosterone eighties filmmaking. There's nothing here that breaks any new action ground, and the performance by Gabriel Byrne as the Prince of Darkness (his dialogue and strange accent make him sound like he's doing a Henny Youngman shtick) is embarrassing. When Schwarzenegger throws down his guns (always a bad sign) and figures out that faith, not bullets, destroys evil, there's little to do but wait for some enlightenment. It never comes.—*Bruce Diones* (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E. Walk, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, Waverly 1 and 2, and Ziegfeld.)

FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE (1965)—When Sergio Leone fabricated the Old West on location in Spain, he performed a sort of reverse plastic surgery on the face of mythical America, adding scars, stubble, and terrifying expressions of emptiness. The spaghetti Western existed before Leone, but he popularized it internationally with three gleefully rabid adventures that turned a TV actor named Clint Eastwood into a movie star. This middle entry in Leone's Eastwood trilogy co-stars the courtly yet ominous Lee Van Cleef. He and Eastwood play bounty hunters who eventually join forces against a mad-dog bandit chieftain played by a volcanic Gian Maria Volonte. This may be the best in the series, thanks to its balance of grungy humor and visual virtuosity—and to its perfect payoff sequence.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Dec. 17.)

THE GREEN MILE—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea West, Coronet Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

THE INSIDER—A self-important but juicily entertaining public-affairs melodrama about big-time journalism and corporate villainy. Russell Crowe plays the real-life whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand, who in 1995 had devastating things to reveal about his former employer, tobacco giant Brown & Williamson, and Al Pacino is the bristling "60 Minutes" producer Lowell Bergman, who was stymied in bringing Wigand's information to the public. They are meant to represent two kinds of personal honor arrayed against corporate game-players, including Michael Gambon as a tobacco executive and Christopher Plummer as a mildly satirized Mike Wallace. Director Michael Mann creates a rising line of tension and paranoia which leads to a muted, not entirely reassuring ending.—*D.D.* (11/8/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, State, and Union Square.)

LIBERTY HEIGHTS—The new Barry Levinson movie is set in the fall of 1954, in the working-class Jewish neighborhood of Baltimore, and all is not well in the Kurtzman family: young Ben (Ben Foster) is falling for the radiant Sylvia (Rebekah Johnson), a black girl in his class. To Ben's mother (Bebe Neuwirth), this is a personal insult, although his father (Joe Mantegna) is too busy running a numbers racket out of his burlesque theatre to take

much notice. At the same time, their older son, Van (Adrien Brody), is pursuing an icy Wasp goddess (Carolyn Murphy) with gratifying success. This sneaky breaching of cultural and ethnic frontiers is Levinson's favorite theme; he finds comic alliances where other directors would sniff for confrontation, and he skillfully avoids the traps of sentimental softness.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

MANSFIELD PARK—It's Jane Austen, but not as we know it. Aware, perhaps, that this is one of the sterner and less loved of the novels, the director and screenwriter Patricia Rozema has taken shameless liberties and encouraged her actors to do the same. The plot is simplified but intact: impoverished Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor) is brought to live with her wealthier relations, among them Sir Thomas Bertram (Harold Pinter) and his son Edmund (Jonny Lee Miller). Their lives are churned up by the arrival of the dashing Crawfords—Henry (Alessandro Nivola) and Mary (Embeth Davidtz), both of whom have various designs upon Fanny. Everyone in this movie seems to fancy everyone else: how very different from the home life of the late Miss Austen. The picture, however willful, has a welcome audacity and a hard, dis-

THEATRE ADDRESSES

(For show times, call 777-FILM,
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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)
ANGELIKA FILM CENTER, 18 W. Houston St.
ART GREENWICH TWIN, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
ASTOR PLAZA, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
BEEKMAN, Second Ave. at 66th St.
CHELSEA CINEMAS, 260 W. 23rd St.
CHELSEA WEST, 333 W. 23rd St.
CINEMA I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA 3RD AVENUE, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
CORONET CINEMAS, Third Ave. at 59th St.
CRITERION CENTER, Broadway at 44th St.
EAST 85TH STREET, First Ave. at 85th St.
EAST 86TH STREET CINEMAS, Third Ave. at 86th St.
EASTSIDE PLAYHOUSE, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84TH STREET SIXPLEX, Broadway at 84th St.
42ND STREET E WALK, 42nd St. near 8th Ave.
59TH STREET EAST CINEMA, 239 E. 59th St.
FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
FIRST & 62ND CINEMAS, 400 E. 62nd St.
GOTHAM CINEMA, Third Ave. at 58th St.
KIPS BAY THEATRE, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS, Broadway at 63rd St.
LINCOLN SQUARE, Broadway at 68th St.
METRO CINEMA I AND 2, Broadway at 99th St.
MURRAY HILL CINEMAS, 160 E. 34th St.
NEW YORK TWIN, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19TH STREET EAST 6, Broadway at 19th St.
OLYMPIA I AND II, Broadway at 107th St.
ORPHEUM VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
PARIS, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
PARK & 86TH STREET CINEMAS, 125 E. 86th St.
QUAD CINEMA, 34 W. 13th St.
THE SCREENING ROOM, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72ND STREET EAST, Third Ave. at 71st St.
62ND & BROADWAY, 62 W. 62nd St.
64TH AND 2ND, Second Ave. at 64th St.
STATE, Broadway at 45th St.
SUTTON I AND 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
UNION SQUARE, Broadway at 13th St.
VILLAGE EAST CINEMAS, Second Ave. at 12th St.
VILLAGE THEATRE VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
WAVERLY I AND 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
WORLDWIDE CINEMAS, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
ZIEGFELD, 141 W. 54th St.

comforting look that dispels the plushness of ordinary costume drama.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING (1975)—John Huston's exhilarating farfetched adventure fantasy, based on the Rudyard Kipling short story, is about two roughneck con men, Danny and Peachy (Sean Connery and Michael Caine), in Victoria's England, who decide to conquer a barbarous land for themselves, and set out for Kafiristan, a region that was once ruled by Alexander the Great. This ironic fable about imperialism has some of the pleasures of "Gunga Din"; it's a wonderfully full and satisfying movie, with superb performances by Connery and Caine and also by Saeed Jaffrey, who plays Billy Fish.—*Pauline Kael* (The Screening Room; Dec. 19.)

THE OWL AND THE PUSSYCAT (1970)—George Segal and Barbra Streisand give this romantic comedy, about a hooker and a self-deceiving would-be writer who works in a bookstore, a good, fast, raucous spirit. There's an air of festivity about their teamwork. Her words come out impetuously fast and hit such surprising notes that she creates her own suspense—she is a living, talking cliff-hanger. And he supplies a steadying grace. Director Herbert Ross's picture is just a doodle, but it's one of the most enjoyable comedies of its era.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Dec. 20.)

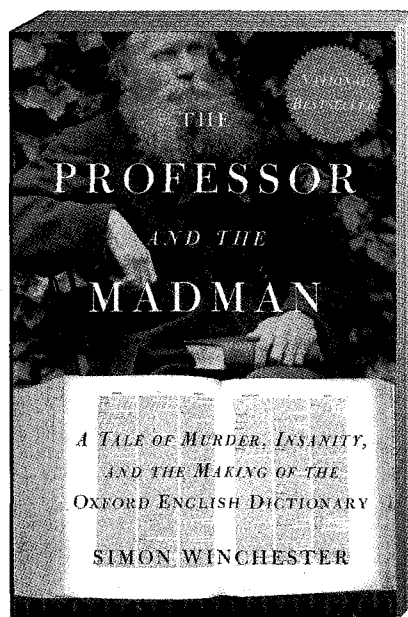
RIDE WITH THE DEVIL—Two young friends (Skeet Ulrich and Tobey Maguire) are caught up in the rough edges of the Civil War at the Kansas-Missouri border; instead of grand campaigns, we get woodland skirmishes and deceitful ambushes, and an uneasy sense that the moral advantage is constantly changing hands. Confronted for the first time with action scenes, the director Ang Lee acquits himself honorably, and his uncanny feel for the moodiness of landscape remains undimmed. The cast is a touch underpowered; this is a film about young men in deep trouble, but they look more blanked out than coarsened by their plight. With Jeffrey Wright as a trusty servant and Jewel, the pop star, making a fine debut as a lusty widow. Thankfully, she waits until the credits before bursting into song.—*A.L.* (Art Greenwich Twin and Lincoln Square.)

SLEEPY HOLLOW—Tim Burton's retelling of Washington Irving's old tale is impressively sinister—the light is invariably a sombre, chill gray; foul mists, like a spreading poison, envelop the streets and houses. But, like any stylized look that lacks sufficient human interest, the atmosphere of "Sleepy Hollow" grows monotonous. Johnny Depp is charming but weightless as Ichabod Crane, rationalist seeker of truth. The other characters—men with pale, pinched faces in frock coats and wigs, women in Empire-style gowns with corseted breasts—make stunning first impressions, but then they start talking gibberish and we lose interest.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

SWEET AND LOWDOWN—Sean Penn, in cream-colored suits and matching hat, a cigarette dangling from his lips, gives one of the best performances ever seen in a Woody Allen film. He plays Emmet Ray, the notorious (and made-up) jazz guitarist from the thirties, a great artist who was also a worm and a loser. Emmet handles his instrument almost as well as his idol Django Reinhardt, but he's the victim of his own neuroses and obsessions. His not knowing himself at all is turned into a joke, but it's also played for pathos—incomprehension is Emmet's soulfulness, mysteriously linked to his elegant playing. The picture is made up of short vignettes framed by "memories" of Emmet spoken by various experts, including Allen himself, and the entire movie is caught in the loving grip of jazz-world nostalgia, with its stylized glamour of thirties clothes and cars—the tawdry life on the road, in which the greatest art was made on the run. With

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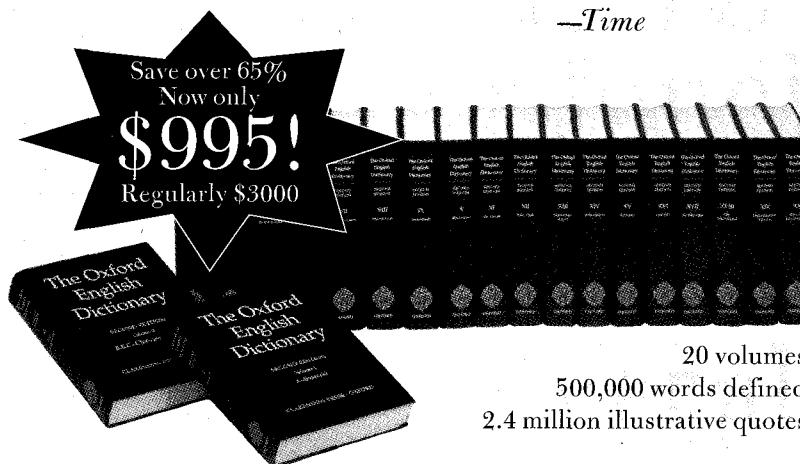


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the English actress Samantha Morton, hatted and crumpled-faced, her body hidden in a shapeless dress, as the mute girl who falls for Emmet. Golden-hued cinematography by Zhao Fei. The contemporary guitarists Howard Alden and Bucky Pizzarelli do the playing. In all, one of Allen's finest achievements.—*D.D.* (12/6/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

TOY STORY 2—A rarity—a sequel that's better than the original. Director John Lasseter's computer filmmaking techniques have broken some new technological ground since his original 1995 smash. His achievement is a stunning marriage of gorgeous detail work (bright and textured backgrounds that evoke the same sense of wonder that made "A Bug's Life" so beautiful) and computer-generated characters with remarkably lively features. To this accomplishment he's added some crack-jack storytelling, filled with action and lighthearted humor, which sets this film apart from many previous computer-animated features. The premise of the film—what happens to old toys when children don't want them anymore—gives Lasseter plenty of leeway to take his characters beyond the children's room and into a breathtakingly alive adult world. The rousing action scenes and the emotional drive of the characters (there's much said about friendship and loyalty) would make anybody weaned on Spielberg cry for joy.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.)

TUMBLEWEEDS—The camera is relaxed, moving with the characters, but still the great English actress Janet McTeer, in her first major film performance, bursts the frame with her vitality. This actress has more body, bigger eyes, a freer laugh—more soul, too—than we are used to seeing in movies. Her Mary Jo, a slightly frayed Southern working-class beauty, depends on her ability to attract men. Nothing else has ever really worked for her, but when she jumps into relationships, she's too honest to keep her mouth shut, and soon she has to jump out of them, dragging her little daughter (Kimberly Brown) along with her. Mary Jo is lovable but exasperating, and the mixed feelings she promotes make the movie continuously exciting. A small picture, but a fully felt one. Written by Angela Shelton and Gavin O'Connor, who also plays Mary Jo's irritable boyfriend and directs, with an easy hand.—*D.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH—Once again, 007 (Pierce Brosnan) is called upon to save the world's natural resources; environmental viewers everywhere will applaud his efforts to save a Turkish oil pipeline. With him is Dr. Christmas Jones (Denise Richards), who is big in warheads; against him is an unstable skinhead called Renard (Robert Carlyle); underneath him is Elektra King (Sophie Marceau), a shady billionaire. Much of the movie is airless and oddly muddled; the opening quarter of an hour, however, which surges into a London boat chase, provides as much fun as you can legally have in a public place. Directed by Michael Apted.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (11/22/99): Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . **AMERICAN BEAUTY** (9/20/99): BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII. . . **AMERICAN MOVIE**: Film Forum. . . **THE BONE COLLECTOR**: 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas. . . **BOYS DON'T CRY** (10/18-25/99): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square. . . **BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB**: Screening Room. . . **CARTOON NOIR**: Cinema Village. . . **DEUCE BIG-LOW**: MALE GIGOLO: Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion

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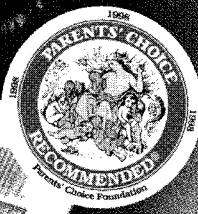
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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Films about the future. Dec. 18 at 1:30: "Blade Runner—The Director's Cut" (Ridley Scott, 1982). . . . Dec. 18-19 at 3:30: "Alphaville" (1965, Jean-Luc Godard, in French). . . . Dec. 19 at 1:30: "Fahrenheit 451" (1966, François Truffaut).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Dec. 15: "The Port of Last Resort" (1999, Joan Grossman and Paul Rosdy) and "Memory of Berlin" (1998, John Burgan). . . . ¶ Through Dec. 19: A series of films celebrating actress Maria Montez.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Dec. 15: "Mother and Son" (1997, Alexander Sokurov). . . . Dec. 16: "The Piano" (1993, Jane Campion). . . . Dec. 17: "For a Few Dollars More" (†). . . . Dec. 18: "They Drive by Night" (1940, Raoul Walsh). . . . Dec. 19: "The Maltese Falcon" (1941, John Huston). . . . Dec. 20: "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" (1936, Frank Capra). . . . Dec. 21: "8½" (1963, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films celebrating Columbia Pictures' seventy-fifth anniversary. Dec. 15: "In a Lonely Place" (1950, Nicholas Ray) and "Knock on Any Door" (1949, Ray). . . . Dec. 16: "The Reckless Moment" (1949, Max Ophuls) and "Dead Reckoning" (1947, John Cromwell). . . . Dec. 17-18: "The Collector" (1965, William Wyler) and "Bonjour Tristesse" (1958, Otto Preminger). . . . Dec. 19: "The Professionals" (1966, Richard Brooks) and "3:10 to Yuma" (1959, Delmer Daves). . . . Dec. 20: "Born Yesterday" (1950, George Cukor) and "The Owl and the Pussycat" (†). . . . Dec. 21: "The Front" (1976, Martin Ritt) and "Happy Birthday, Wanda June" (1971, Mark Robson).

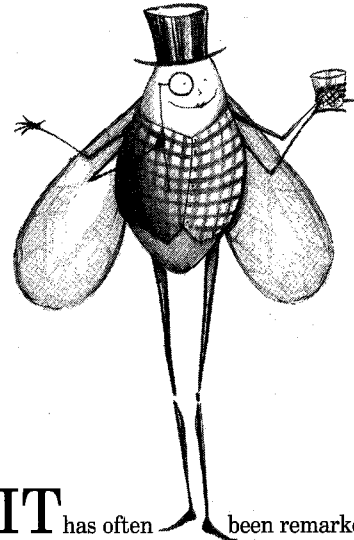
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Dec. 19: A program of films representing recent work from the independent states of the former Soviet Union. Dec. 17 at 2:30: "Checkpoint" (1998, Alexander Rogozhkin; in Russian). . . . Dec. 17 at 7: "Letters Not About Love" (1998, Jacki Ochs). . . . Dec. 18 at 2: "Guard Me, My Talisman" (1986, Roman Balayan; in Russian). . . . Dec. 18 at 5: "The Flight of the Bee" (1998, Jamshed Usmonov and Ming Biong Hun; in Tajik). . . . Dec. 19 at 2: "Wednesday, 19.07.1961" (1997, Viktor Kossakovsky; in Russian). . . . Dec. 19 at 5: "Pavel and Lyalya" (1999, Viktor Kossakovsky; in Russian) and "Alone" (1998, Dimitri Kabakov; in Russian). . . . ¶ A celebration of the centenary of Duke Ellington. Dec. 20 at 6: "Mexican Suite" (1970, Gary Keys). . . . Dec. 21 at 6: "Memories of Duke" (1980, Keys). . . . ¶ Through April 2000: A program of silent films, 1893 to 1928, from the museum's collection.

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Feb. 13: "Super Bowl: Super Showcase for Commercials." Frank Gifford narrates the ascendance of television's premier venue for new advertisements.

THE SCREENING ROOM, 54 Varick St. (332-2100)—Dec. 15-16: "Beyond the Clouds" (Michelangelo Antonioni). . . . ¶ The films of Michael Caine. Dec. 17: "Dressed to Kill" (1980, Brian de Palma) and "Deathtrap" (1982, Sidney Lumet). . . . Dec. 18: "Get Carter" (1971, Mike Hodges) and "Pulp" (1972, Hodges). . . . Dec. 19: "The Man Who Would Be King" (†) and "Zulu" (1964, Cy Enfield). . . . Dec. 20: "The Icress File" (1965, Sidney Furie) and "Billion Dollar Brain" (1967, Ken Russell). . . . Dec. 21: "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" (1988, Frank Oz) and "The Italian Job" (1969, Peter Collinson).

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Contemporary Spanish cinema. All films are in Spanish or Catalan with English subtitles. Dec. 15: "Ocaña, Intermittent Portrait" (1978, Ventura Pons) and "What's It All About?" (1994, Pons). . . . Dec. 16-17: "Lisboa" (1999, Antonio Hernández) and "Between Your Legs" (1999, Manuel Gómez Pereira). . . . Dec. 18 and 20: "Babaouo" (1999, Manuel Cussó-Ferrer). . . . Dec. 18-19: "Jealousy" (1999, Vincente Aranda). . . . Dec. 18, 19, and 21: "Flowers from Another World" (1999, Iciar Bollain). . . . Dec. 19-20 "The Cherry Tree" (1998, Marc Recha). . . . Dec. 20 and 21: "Rapture" (1979, Ivan Zulueta).

HAMISH NOT SQUEAMISH



IT has often been remarked that devotees of The Macallan Malt Whisky nurture an almost mystical belief in the 'water of life' qualities of their favourite dram. But seldom has it found such expression as in the following true anecdote kindly related to us by Mr C. Wemyss of Ravenhead, Notts.

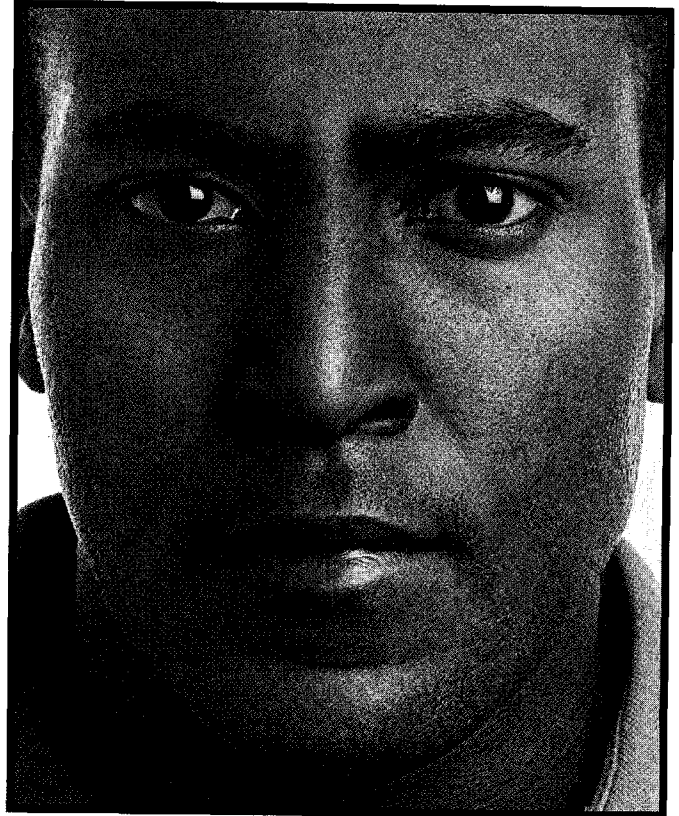
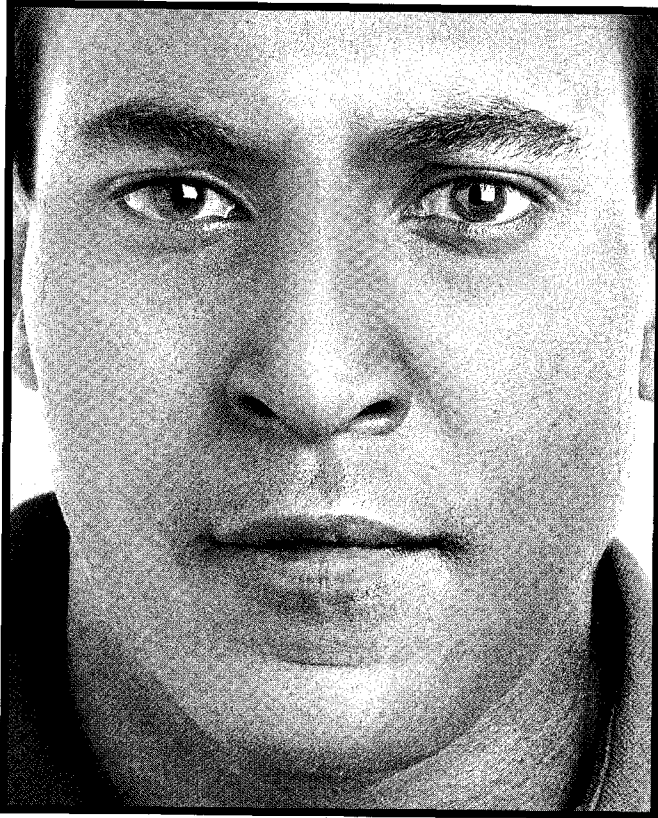
'My friend Hamish, at a pre-Christmas party in my garden, found a fly had landed in his glass, and drowned. "Don't worry, Hamish," said I. "Have another Macallan in a clean glass." "I shall do nothing of the sort," he replied, removing the tiny creature from his glass and sipping the sherry-gold elixir.

"The Macallan never hurt a fly, and nor does a fly hurt The Macallan!" Ten minutes later indeed the insect stirred and flew off.

"There you are," said Hamish triumphantly. "And now you can give me a gnat's more."

THE MACALLAN. THE MALT.

THE MACALLAN® Scotch Whisky. 43% alc./vol.
Sole U.S. importer Rémy Amérique, Inc., New York, N.Y.
© 1999 The Macallan Distillers Ltd.



Which man looks guilty? If you picked the man on the right, you're wrong. Wrong for judging people based on the color of their skin. Because if you look closely, you'll see they're the same man. Unfortunately, racial stereotyping like this happens every day. On America's highways, police stop drivers based on their skin color rather than for the way they are driving. For example, in Florida 80% of those stopped and searched were black and Hispanic, while they constituted only 5% of all drivers. These humiliating and illegal searches are violations of the Constitution and must be fought. Help us defend your rights. Support the ACLU. www.aclu.org **american civil liberties union**



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

Russia gets a new strongman.



BY now, we're all familiar with George W. Bush's lack of familiarity with the greater world, but he is not the only candidate to wield, at times, a certain willful ignorance. According to press reports, in 1995 American intelligence officials provided Bush's rival front-runner, Al Gore, with a file detailing the business shenanigans of his close negotiating partner Viktor Chernomyrdin, who was then Russia's Prime Minister. Gore, not wanting to believe that he'd been dealing with a shady fellow, wrote "Bullshit" across the file.

A lack of curiosity about a depressed, semi-stable, resentful, and still nuclear Russia is not intellectually or politically appealing—not in a feckless Yale, not in an earnest Harvard man. The next American President is likely to be doing business with a new Russian counterpart who, by all appearances, is professionally tough, rhetorically profane, fed up with Western influence, and (how to put this nicely?) a product of the K.G.B. Vladimir Putin, who was appointed Prime Minister four months ago, has become the odds-on favorite to succeed Boris Yeltsin as President, and his poll ratings are due not to his heartfelt commitment to democratic values but, rather, to his disgraceful prosecution of the current war in Chechnya and the language he has used to win support for it.

It's been a long time since Stalin routinely spoke of "enemies of the people" in the ranks of the political elite, and Khrushchev railed against "pederasts" in the ranks of the abstract painters, but Putin, who worked for the K.G.B. for

fifteen years as a foreign-intelligence officer, and who knows what else, in East Germany and beyond, has from the start brandished the vocabulary of intimidation. When rebel Chechens began fighting in neighboring Dagestan, Putin vowed to "strangle the [Chechen] vermin" and to pursue the rebels wherever they went: "We'll wipe them out, even in the outhouse." Corrupt officials would be caught, like "the rats they are." Putin warned that he would not tolerate weakness among his military leaders, declaring that he did not want gen-

miliated by the Chechens in 1996. By cooperating closely with the leading Russian commanders, and by giving them a remarkable measure of independence, he has won their gratitude and support like no other Prime Minister in recent memory.

Putin's rapid rise marks an important moment in the development of Russia since the fall of the Soviet state, in 1991. Beginning late in the Gorbachev period, some intellectuals wondered whether the country didn't require a strong hand, even an iron hand, to lead it from the totalitarian past into the democratic future. Putin is the apotheosis of this thinking. "The country, which has long been dreaming about its own Pinochet, has probably got one," a commentator named Alexander Budberg wrote last week in the tabloidish newspaper *Moskovski Komsomolets*. The truth is that Putin has flashed a Pinochet-like brutality to great effect but has revealed little of the Chilean general's desire for liberal economic and political reforms.

Yeltsin, for his part, seems only half alive as he shuttles from the Kremlin to the hospital and back again; last week he was barely able to finish a speech in Moscow ("This is the end, isn't it?" he muttered as he fumbled through his pages) and then went off to Beijing,

where, after the White House criticized his Chechen policy, he reminded it of Moscow's "full nuclear arsenal." Yeltsin has promised to step aside this summer, after his second term ends, and, at least for now, he has thrown his bulk behind Putin. The alternatives—the Communist Gennady Zyuganov, and an autocratic partnership of former Prime



*Vladimir Putin
and Boris Yeltsin*

erals "who chew on their own snot."

With this language of national populism, Putin exploited the very real problem of terrifying lawlessness in Chechnya and, at the same time, deflected attention from his government's failure to build a healthy economy or a working legal system. Putin has also rallied the Russian military, which was hu-



Minister Yevgeny Primakov (another ex-spook) and the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov—are not much more attractive.

Yeltsin's closest advisers are now waging a propaganda campaign, claiming that, well, actually, Putin, while plenty tough, is a democrat "deep in his heart." (One of those advisers made a frenzied tour of various newspaper and magazine offices, including ours, last week.) At this point, as Moscow continues to bombard Grozny, a city that already looks like the Stalingrad of 1943, the American candidates can expect an era of statist revival in Russia. An American President who doesn't much care or one who takes out a pen to dismiss reality with a barnyard epithet will fail a crucial test.

—DAVID REMNICK

INK

A champion in the ring takes on the literary world.



LIKE conquering generals returning to Rome, best-selling authors often enjoy a kind of victory promenade through Manhattan. The writer is honored at glittery luncheons and cocktail events, gives thoughtful readings, and may even exchange televised witticisms with Charlie Rose himself. So it was a mild sur-

prise, the other day, to find the best-selling author Mick Foley, a.k.a. Mankind, who is also a three-time World Wrestling Federation champion, pondering his literary success over a bowl of matzo-ball soup at Ratner's deli, down on Delancey Street. Mankind, who was in town to wrestle at Madison Square Garden, had no bookish soirées planned, but he was happy to expound on his new craft. "Aesthetically, the worst injury I ever had was when I got most of one ear ripped off," he jovially declared. "It makes for a very good opening chapter and a great first sentence. I'll take that over 'Call me Ishmael' any day."

Mankind's memoir, "Have a Nice Day!," recently unseated Frank McCourt's "Tis" from the top of the *Times* nonfiction best-seller list, after five weeks in print. That's just two weeks less than it took Foley to write the book, which he composed in longhand, on seven hundred and sixty pages of foolscap notepaper. Foley, who wrestles in a studded leather Hannibal Lecter-style mask, is a devotee of the Civil War histories of Bruce Catton, and he read all of "Moby Dick" during a particularly violent wrestling tour of Japan. He began writing on his own only after an unsuccessful collaboration with a ghost-writer. "He was a nice sixty-nine-year-old man who was trying to write like a thirty-four-year-old wrestler," said Foley, whose signature maneuver, the Mandible Claw, involves seizing his

gaping opponent by the tongue and lower jaw. "I broke the news as gently as I could."

Although Foley weighs close to three hundred pounds, he has a reputation, among his peers, for taking more punishment than he gives. During fifteen years in the ring, he has broken five ribs and suffered eight concussions, among other injuries (the ear got caught in the ropes and was only partially repaired). He has fallen twenty feet onto the ring in a "scaffold match" in Texas, and has been blown up in an "exploding ring death match" in Kawasaki, Japan. Among W.W.F. aficionados, he is revered for an especially grisly Hell in a Cell match he fought in a cage, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A giant wrestler called the Undertaker flung him from the top of the cage, dislocating his shoulder, and then knocked him out cold. Mankind reveals in his memoir that the Undertaker had a broken foot that night, so he felt obliged to absorb most of the "bumps," which is wrestle-speak for falls.

The popularity of professional wrestling (the Garden matches were sold out) has made Mankind a national figure, but Foley does not appear spoiled by his success. He grew up in a middle-class home, in East Setauket, Long Island, and still has the shaggy looks of an overgrown high-school prankster. Aside from Catton and Melville, his early professional influences were esoteric wrestlers like Bruiser Brody and a surly Englishman named the Dynamite Kid. Foley fought for years under the name Cactus Jack, and became Mankind only in 1996, after he joined the W.W.F. The wrestling world is divided into "baby faces" (good guys) and "heels" (bad guys). Mankind was conceived as a heel, but he has evolved into a baby face. He now avoids dangerous maneuvers like the Power Bomb (a violent back-flip body slam) and executes the Mandible Claw with the help of a jabbering sock puppet called Socko.

Foley's softer side also emerges in his literary critiques. "I picked up 'Angela's Ashes' specifically so I could hate it," he said. "Of course, I ended up loving it." Like most authors, he has few kind words for book critics, mainly because "Have a Nice Day!" has been completely ignored by the literary press. "I can't help but feel that the book business in a lot of ways is faker than pro

wrestling," he said. But several of the waiters at Ratner's knew Mankind's work, and one of them, clearing away his soup plate, murmured, "Gooood boook." Foley thanked the man for the compliment, and began to muse about future projects. He said that his knees were giving out, so Mankind would probably be retiring from the ring in the year 2000. After that, he might try his hand at fiction, or write a follow-up memoir, like his fellow professional writer Frank McCourt. "This No. 1 best-seller thing, it's not too different from winning a championship belt," Mankind said. "Once a best-seller, always a best-seller. There aren't too many of us out there." —ADAM PLATT

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL

A Hollywood job for Bill Clinton?

 AFTER thirty-three years as the head of the Motion Picture Association of America, Jack Valenti spoke to a reporter about retirement for the first time. "It may be one year, two years, it may be when I'm ninety-four," Valenti, who is seventy-eight, said the other day in his Washington office. Still, he's lobbying for a replacement who, in his view, carries the proper, distinguished credentials. "The No. 1 specification for this job is to have a global reputation in whatever field," he said. "The chief modus operandi of this organization is diplomatic relations, which means you would want somebody in the political world or the diplomatic field. A Henry Kissinger type, a United States senator type, a Cabinet type, or out of the White House, like me."

Or like the President, perhaps? That's what one hears inside the studios on the West Coast, and at European film festivals as well. At Cannes, Valenti's No. 2, Bill Baker, was heard discussing the rumors that Bill Clinton might be his next boss. "I've heard people talking about that," Valenti said, with a grin, and added, "Well, yeah, it would be great. It really would. But he does bring a little baggage with him."

The M.P.A.A., a trade association made up of the seven major film studios, was founded in 1922, after a series

of scandals that peaked with the ugly death of a starlet at the house of the comedian Fatty Arbuckle. As Valenti put it, "The movie moguls decided they needed to change their image and get hold of things." The studios hired Will Hays, from President Harding's Cabinet, to become the association's president. Hays went on to establish the Hays Office—separate from the M.P.A.A.—which for decades censored sex, violence, profanity, and more in American movies.

Valenti came to the association in 1966, from the White House, where he had been a political assistant to Lyndon Johnson, and was widely known for having said, "I sleep each night a little better, a little more confidently, because Lyndon Johnson is President." Over the years, he has turned the association into "a small State Department," as he likes to call it. "I'm the chief lobbyist, but I very seldom do any lobbying," he explained. "I have some very expensive lobbyists who roam those corridors on the Hill and go to all the damn fund-raisers, and I spend seventy-five per cent of my time on international issues and diplomacy."

Like Clinton, Valenti has been through a few controversies—most recently over the association's standards for rating movies—and difficult periods of his own. He has been criticized in America and



Bill Clinton
and Jack Valenti

abroad for naming Baker, who had a long career at the F.B.I. and the C.I.A., as the association's executive vice-president.

Not surprisingly, White House officials are quick to dismiss the notion of this possible second career for Clinton. Jake Siewert, Clinton's deputy press secretary, says simply, "The President sleeps better knowing that Jack Valenti is still at the helm." And, while some studio

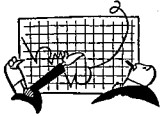
executives on the West Coast are keen on the idea, their counterparts back in Washington aren't sure it's what the M.P.A.A. needs right now. "Jack would love to have his shoes filled by Bill Clinton," one of them said. "But former Presidents and Cabinet secretaries have very bad work habits. We want to have a manager rather than a dignitary."

Nevertheless, Valenti thinks that Clinton could be great for the job. "The movie business is a dazzling, fascinating, unpredictable world—like politics—and naturally Clinton is drawn to that," he said, his voice filling with enthusiasm. What's more, he went on, "if you're in the insurance business or run the New York Stock Exchange, you're not around beautiful women every day."

—DANA THOMAS

DEPT. OF WINNING

Why does the Nobel Prize in Economics get no respect?

 AFTER the physicist Murray Gell-Mann won the Nobel prize, in 1969, he described the award ceremony for a couple of colleagues. When he mentioned the two winners of the prize in economics, which was inaugurated that year, another scientist interrupted, aghast: "You mean they sat on the *platform* with you?" Last Friday night, at the ceremony in Stockholm, the economist Robert Alexander Mundell, the father of the Euro, shared the dais with physicists, a biologist, and a chemist. But the feeling that the economics Nobel isn't quite as real as the other, older Nobels—and that, by implication, economics, the only social science with its own Nobel, isn't really a science at all—has never entirely faded.

Laureates in economics get the same million-or-so-dollar honorarium as winners of the five other prizes. And they are selected through the same lengthy, elaborate, secret process. But the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, which administers the economics prize—it is actually called the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, as it is the only prize not established by his will—draws all manner of subtle distinctions. The name of the economics laureate, for example, is engraved

TEMPING FOR HILLARY

TO: The East Wing
FROM: The West Wing

The President was delighted to hear Mrs. Clinton announce that she is going to declare her candidacy for the U.S. Senate next year. However, this raises the question of who will perform the First Lady's duties during the long Senate campaign. While the President acknowledges that no one could ever "replace" Mrs. Clinton, he has proposed creating the office of Temporary First Lady, for which he has compiled the following shortlist of candidates:

1. Shania Twain: The midriff-baring Nashville songbird could enliven state dinners by entertaining visiting dignitaries with some of her hits, although the President would like to steer her toward "Man! I Feel Like a Woman!" and away from "Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under?"

2. Catherine Zeta-Jones: Despite some concerns that the screen-scorching actress is too young to be Temporary First Lady, the President's stated position is "Get outta here—she played opposite that geezer Sean Connery."

3. Sable: The wrestling sensation and *Playboy* model is a long-shot candidate, but the President feels that we should be thinking "outside the box."

TO: The West Wing
FROM: The East Wing

The First Lady is glad that the President is hard at work on this issue. She agrees that the President should not be left alone in the White House for a long period of time. Consequently, she has prepared a shortlist of her own:

1. Dame Judi Dench: The First Lady believes that Dame Judi, having played Queens Elizabeth and Victoria, has a knack for the sort of blistering, imperious scolding that is invaluable in the job.

2. Janet Reno: Attorney General Reno's appointment to this position would dramatically reduce relocation costs. One possible downside: whenever she comes to the White House, Buddy growls at her.

3. Sister Wendy: Everyone loves PBS's "art nun," and Sister Wendy would be sure to turn routine tours of the White House into spunky curatorial adventures. As a nun, Sister Wendy may not relish the idea of serving as First Lady to President Clinton, but it may be possible to convince her that it could be helpful to her should she wish to be considered for sainthood.

—ANDY BOROWITZ

on the *edge* of his golden medal instead of on the front, like those of the other laureates. (Because of this obscure protocol, which is also observed with the Peace Prize, in 1975 the American Tjalling Koopmans and the Russian Leonid Kantorovich took home each other's medal by mistake.) Also, the Nobel lecture by the economics laureate is reprinted in a separate section of *Les Prix Nobel*, the annual publication of Nobel addresses. As a guest at a recent Nobel ceremony put it, "They make it clear in every way that this is not a real Nobel prize."

Even in the early years, when acknowledged economics giants like Paul Samuelson, Kenneth Arrow, and Milton Friedman were being honored, there were calls to abolish the newly created prize. Gunnar Myrdal, the author of "An American Dilemma," who,

with Friedrich von Hayek, won the prize in 1974, threatened to introduce a motion in the academy to kill it. Economics was "soft," he said at the time—just a bunch of political opinions. And, in the last few years, there has been a feeling within the Academy of Sciences that every truly deserving candidate has already won the prize, and that only second-raters remain.

Other recipients of the economics prize have had reservations about it, too. When Friedrich von Hayek toasted the King and Queen of Sweden during the Nobel banquet, he said that, had he been consulted, he would have "decidedly advised against" creating the prize in the first place. And, after winning last year's medal, Amartya Sen, the liberal Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, said in an interview, "I've always been skeptical of

the prize, but it's difficult to express that until you get it because people think it's just sour grapes."

The uncontentious vote on Sen's Nobel—which had long been opposed by one member of the selection committee—actually seemed to mark the end of a period of discord about the prize. Sen, who is a philosopher and a public intellectual as well as an economist, was honored in part for his emphasis on the ethical dimension of economic decisions involving poverty, inequality, and human rights. The academy apparently considered him just the right recipient to counteract the unwelcome flurry of press attention brought on by the previous year's economics laureates, Robert Merton and Myron Scholes. Within a year of winning the prize, for their formula for valuing the financial instruments known as options, Merton and Scholes saw their reputations besmirched in the Long-Term Capital Management debacle.

—SYLVIA NASAR

DEPT. OF LIFESAVERS

Hail the conquering oncologist.



THE other evening, James Quill, a cheerful, muscular thirty-four-year-old man, flew to New York from his home, in San Francisco, for one night only—to attend a party at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, honoring Dr. Norma Wollner. She was retiring at the age of seventy, after several decades as a pediatric oncologist. When Quill, a former patient of Dr. Wollner's, arrived, after taking a run in Central Park, showering, and putting on his good suit and a necktie, there were already several dozen dressed-up people—including other patients and former patients and their families—waiting in line to greet and exchange hugs with the honoree.

Dr. Wollner, an elfin woman (five feet one) with short gray hair clipped kid style, knew each guest by name. Each gave her an abridged report on the wherefroms and hows of his or her travels to the party. An angelic four-year-old blond boy, also suited up and necktied, and with a haircut like Dr.

Wollner's, kissed her, calling her Nana Wollner.

"That little boy was a baby, four weeks old, when he was brought to her," James Quill told me, making a noticeable effort to sound casual. "She discovered that he had a malignant germ-cell tumor in his belly. She saved *him*, too." Quill edged closer to the front of the line. "Gosh, I'm nervous," he said. "I'm sweating. I've been asked to give a speech. To everybody here."

"You made it!" Dr. Wollner said to Quill as they embraced. "What a lovely surprise. You don't know how moved I am!" She gave him a keen, calm look-over.

The procession, now including many men and women in white coats, moved along to a large room to join the evening's co-honoree, Dr. Stephen Sternberg, who is Dr. Wollner's husband and a prominent pathologist. He is the founding editor of the medical monthly *American Journal of Surgical Pathology*. He, too, was retiring, at seventy-nine. The chairman of the Department of Pediatrics, Dr. Richard J. O'Reilly, a hulking man with a thick white mane of hair, stepped up to a podium and took charge.

"I want to read a few lines from this poem, by Stephen Spender," Dr. O'Reilly said, and read:

I think continually of those
who were truly great. . . .
The names of those who in
their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts
the fire's center.
Born of the sun, they trav-
elled a short while toward
the sun,
And left the vivid air signed
with their honor.

By now, a few hundred people were jammed into the room, with others standing outside. "Dr. Wollner has given us an incredible lesson in life," Dr. O'Reilly said. He described her development of a chemotherapy regimen—known as the "protocol"—for treating non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, so that "thousands of children have been cured of the disease." He told about her inventing, in 1969, the Pediatric Day Hospital—a system

of sending children home to be with their families at the end of each day of treatment in the hospital—which is now imitated by hospitals all over the country. "And she got Blue Cross and Blue Shield to agree to pay for it!" he said, and everybody laughed and applauded.

Then James Quill was called on to speak. He had to clear his throat before he could get any words out. In 1983, when he was seventeen and going to high school in Wilmington, Delaware, he said, he became ill with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. His doctors there gave up on him, so his family brought him to New York. Dr. Wollner saw him. "I was so scared," Quill said. "But Dr. Wollner came through to me as a loving person, with her voice and her touch, the way she used her hands. She would always *listen* to everything I said. She said, 'Do what I tell you, give it your energy, and you'll get through this.' Three months later, I was fine. I went back to high school and started college. Then, after a year, I moved to New York, to study acting.

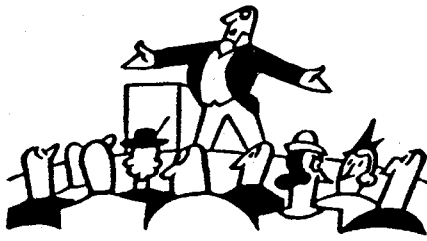
"When I was twenty-four, in my yearly checkup I got bad news: leukemia." He continued, "I cried. Dr. Wollner talked to me. She believed in being honest with her patients, and giving them and their families a chance to un-

derstand how all of them could participate in fighting the illness. I learned that she herself had two daughters, and one of them had had thyroid cancer as a girl and had been cured. She told me, 'Commit to this fight, and you will not die.'

Quill's voice grew firmer and louder. He went on, "I was in the intensive-care unit, in a coma, for ten days. A young and pretty nurse, Laura, came by every day. She brought food for my family while they stood watch over me. Following Dr. Wollner's instruction, everybody kept on talking to me. I must have heard them. I emerged from the coma. I was so weak I could barely stand. Laura made me walk. She loved running, so she opened my eyes to Central Park. Six months later, Laura had me running. We fell in love. In 1992, I was found to have thyroid cancer. So it was the third time I had cancer, but this time all they had to do was take out the thyroid. Dr. Wollner says that, of all her patients, I had it the roughest. But I feel I came through the best. Laura and I got married. Four years ago, we both ran the New York marathon. We had a baby, Andrew, who is now three. We moved to San Francisco. Laura is going to have another baby in a few months. I am very happy to be at this party. I need a beer." —LILLIAN ROSS



"Get some of the firm's other deadwood and form a carolling group."



THE CAMPAIGN

Second-act troubles.

As Governor George W. Bush campaigned briskly through New Hampshire a few days after his second undistinguished performance in a Republican Presidential debate, he was asked by a reporter—in a casual, devilish manner—if he was in favor of LIHEAP. Sure, Bush said, and proceeded to expound upon the intricacies of oil pricing, a question he had fumbled a bit onstage. But what about LIHEAP? the reporter pressed. “I said I was in favor,” Bush replied. “I think there’s about five billion dollars set aside for that.”

The exchange was notable on several counts. Bush clearly passed the threshold test: he knew that LIHEAP was the federal government’s Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (although he was off on the money available, which is \$1.1 billion per year). It was also significant that he favored the program. The response from a less compassionate Sun Belt conservative might have been to suggest that the states, not the federal government, should decide whether to give poor people help with their heating-oil costs. But the question and answer illuminated a far more serious challenge that the Governor now faces: the Republican campaign revolves, almost exclusively, around the question of whether Bush is too sluggardly to be President. Every exchange with reporters is a potential pop quiz. Unless Bush figures out some way to change the subject, he will remain on the defensive, and vulnerable.

The ability to change the subject—to seize control of a campaign and make it be about what you, not the press or your opponents, want it to be about—is an essential political skill. The previous Republican nominee, Bob Dole, didn’t have it; the subtext of the 1996 Presidential campaign, from start to finish, was Dole’s

advanced age. By contrast, Ronald Reagan—who faced a similar problem in the New Hampshire primary of 1980—was able to change the subject from his seniority to the stature of his opponents in a single debate performance. (“I paid for this microphone, Mr. Breen!”) George Bush the Elder was able to change the topic in the 1988 general election from his own, Vice-Presidential wimpiness to Michael Dukakis’s wimpiness. Bill Clinton, the ne plus ultra of political practitioners, reincarnated himself at least twice in the 1992 campaign: he began as a brainy moderate; then, after an involuntary spell as a promiscuous draft-dodger, became the populist basher of a brainy moderate opponent (Paul Tsongas); finally, after becoming—again, involun-



tarily—too slick to trust, he reëmerged, triumphantly, as the Man from Hope.

The current clot of Presidential candidates isn’t nearly as supple. Indeed, only Al Gore has managed to produce a second act for himself, and he has done so in the most banal manner possible—by attacking his opponent. He began by assaulting former Senator Bill Bradley’s admirable, if expensive, six-hundred-and-fifty-billion-dollar health-care proposal. He has since expanded his attacks to include Bradley’s (former) position on school vouchers, Bradley’s (former) willingness to discuss the age of eligibility for Social Security, Bradley’s (understandable) decision not to run for reëlection as a senator in 1996, and Bradley’s (hypothetical) position on raising taxes.

The last may have been an attack too many, since Gore himself does not preclude the possibility of a tax increase. But the strategy has worked: the stories about the Vice-President’s ineptitude—his changes of headquarters, wardrobe, and advisers—have waned, and he is slightly more buoyant in the polls. His campaign seems prepared to continue its assaults, however petty, until forced to do otherwise.

Bradley, whose candidacy has fizzled a bit, needs a second act as badly as George W. Bush does—that’s one reason he agreed to a joint appearance in support of campaign-finance reform with the surging Senator John McCain. He has begun to respond, belatedly, to the Gore attacks, but he always seems to do so wearing his glasses and reading from a careful text, rather than speaking spontaneously. Bradley has yet to show anger at the way Gore has misrepresented him, or much emotion of any sort—and the ebbing trajectory of his campaign won’t be altered until he can change the subject from his passivity and policy defects to Gore’s obnoxiousness.

Even McCain, who has had the happiest of candidacies so far, may soon find himself in need of fresh themes, especially if his fortunes continue to rise and George W. Bush continues to stumble. The Senator from Arizona’s life story and his personal grace, his obvious mastery of foreign policy, and his insistence on campaign-finance reform have been the most impressive political act of 1999. But McCain’s true test will come, most likely, when he is confronted with a ticklish question on an issue that isn’t one of his specialties—a domestic problem, like health insurance or race or poverty, perhaps—and his knowledge and instincts are called into question. McCain was a supporter of the stone-hearted Senator Phil Gramm for President in 1996, and one wonders where he stands on programs like LIHEAP. The focus of the campaign could shift very quickly from Bush’s lack of knowledge about foreign policy to McCain’s lack of interest in domestic policy, especially if Bush grows desperate and chooses to reinvent himself the same way Gore has—by attacking his opponent. “We’re absolutely going to need a second act,” a McCain adviser said recently. “Got any ideas?” —JOE KLEIN

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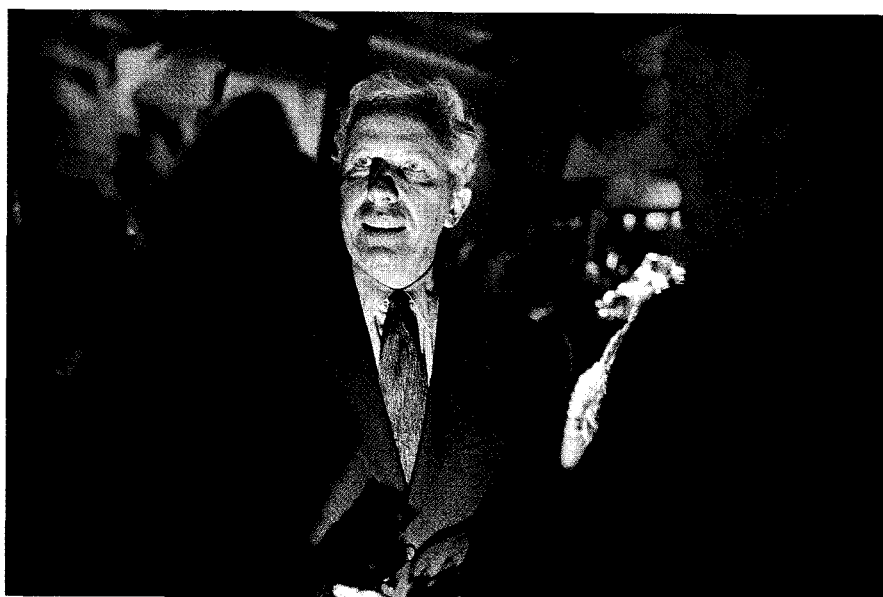
HOW TO SUCCEED

Mark Green is in line to become mayor. But can the man who always distrusted power handle it?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

THESE days, New York City's Public Advocate, Mark Green, gets a lot of invitations from people who he knows don't particularly like him. They ask him to attend their dinners, or to address their local political associations, or to speak at their pri-

second-highest-ranking office yet has practically no official responsibilities apart from harassing the occupant of the top-ranking office. The Public Advocate's job is the only elective post that Green has ever occupied, and it could have been invented for him.



"This city deserves a mayor of New York and not a mayor of Singapore," Green says. Photograph by Gilles Peress.

vate clubs, and whenever he does so there is at least one person in the crowd who cannot resist coming up to him, grabbing his hand or clapping him on the back, and hailing him as the next mayor. After his twenty years of struggling for respect in New York politics, always ardently but mostly unsuccessfully, it would all be very flattering for Green, except that it could just as easily be the reverse.

Green combines a bad knee and prematurely silver hair with a remarkably youthful sense of indignation. He is not so much an inspiring speaker as a quotable one. "Ludicrous and laughable," he called a recent proposal by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. "Unprovoked, unprincipled, and unprecedented." Thanks to a constitutional innovation peculiar to New York, Green holds the city's

Next year, Green will automatically become New York's hundred-and-eighth mayor—if, that is, the hundred-and-seventh goes to Washington. It is not unusual for a mayor to lack executive experience when he takes office: Giuliani was a prosecutor, Ed Koch and John Lindsay were congressmen. But there has probably never been a mayor with quite Green's reflexive distrust of those in power. This is something his detractors insistently emphasize when sketching what they describe as a looming civic disaster. "He's played the outsider, and he's been the outsider," Randy Mastro, a former deputy mayor, told me, not admiringly.

Giuliani's open contempt for the Public Advocate—both the office and the officeholder—has been a running theme

MAGNUM

of his mayoralty. "I can't imagine that there's anyone in the city who doesn't know my opinion of Mark Green," he observed caustically a few months ago, and it was clearly with a notion of thwarting Green that the Mayor set out to rewrite the city charter last summer. Even at this late date, there are those who maintain that the one thing that could still prevent Giuliani from running for the Senate is the knowledge that his victory would also be Green's.

For obvious reasons, Green is in a better position to appreciate the irony of the situation. As he likes to point out, New Yorkers have, in defiance of the Mayor, overwhelmingly endorsed his work as Public Advocate: two years ago, he was reelected with almost three-quarters of the vote. But, as he must also realize, they have been decidedly hesitant to grant him a position of any greater responsibility. The result of his own Senate bid last year was a humiliating third-place finish in the Democratic primary, and most of the attention he is now receiving is a function of Giuliani's popularity rather than his own. Should Green simply inherit the mayoralty, he will be spared having to explain to voters how, as a lifelong critic of authority, he would go about exercising it. But he will still have to find a way to do it.

GREEN is a great believer in the virtues of just showing up. He will go basically anywhere to speak to pretty much anyone about almost anything. He routinely attends three or four events in an evening, some of them glamorous, many of them not. Often, the people whom Green meets remind him that they have met at some other, similar event, a few months—or, perhaps, just a few weeks—before.

On one of the evenings I followed Green, he began his rounds at Mendy's, a delicatessen in midtown Manhattan, where a subcommittee of the Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education was having a meeting. Green put on a baby-blue yarmulke, wolfed down some salad, and made a few brief remarks to the group. Then he headed out to Queens Village to attend a reception hosted by Representative Greg Meeks, battling rush-hour traffic all the way. From there it was off to Rockaway to address the Good Government Democratic Club, whose members listened po-

lately to his speech about the future of the city, then peppered him with questions about local bridge traffic. By the time he got to his final stop, a private meeting with a group of Orthodox Jews in Far Rockaway, he was running almost an hour late, and by the time he got back to Manhattan it was close to midnight.

At no point during the six-hour odyssey, not even when we got lost in the far reaches of Queens, did Green appear frustrated, or disheartened, or even bored. I was sitting in the back of his official car with him, and at my request he spent much of the ride rehearsing his biography. In the background, a collection of songs put together for Green by his daughter was playing on the cassette deck. As I later learned, Green plays this same cassette virtually every night. His aides refer to it simply as "the tape."

Green grew up on Long Island, the son of a schoolteacher and a lawyer who dealt in real estate on the side. As a teenager, he was a nationally ranked tennis player, and at Cornell, which he attended in the mid-sixties, he was co-captain of the team, as well as No. 2 in squash. "I once figured out, on a day that I was searching for self-esteem, that I was the second-best Jewish squash player in college," he told me, adding, "I probably could have figured out that I was No. 1 if I had narrowed the category even more."

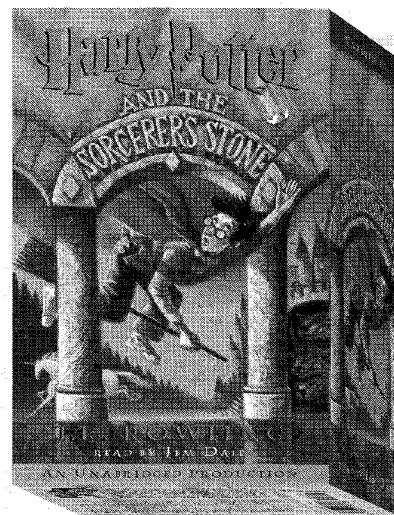
Talking about himself, Green often veers between grandiosity and comic self-knowledge, as if torn between wanting his audience to recognize the significance of what he has accomplished and wanting credit for recognizing that this desire is likely to come across as unseemly. This makes him appear slightly out of control yet also rather likable. In his stories, he is almost always the hero, but he is not infrequently also the buffoon.

Green traces his political career, for example, back to an embarrassing incident that occurred one summer when he was an intern for Senator Jacob Javits on Capitol Hill. With some other interns, he wrote a letter to President Johnson protesting the Vietnam War. Someone released it to the *Washington Post*, and, perhaps because it was a slow news week, it got a lot of coverage, including mention in a column by Mary McGrory. The flap, by Green's account, prompted Javits to get angry, Johnson to cancel his annual meeting with the interns at

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the Washington Monument, and the House of Representatives to eliminate its internship program for the next three years. Green described the contretemps as his "first experience at the synapse of policy, media, and controversy." I asked him how he had felt during it. In the dimness of the car, he smiled broadly and said, "I loved it."

After graduating from Harvard Law School, Green went back to Washington, where he spent ten years working for Ralph Nader, riding a motorcycle, and doing "a lot of important work in the antitrust area . . . too boring to recall." In the process, he wrote several books, one of which, "Who Runs Congress?" made the *Times* best-seller list. As we were inching through western Queens, Green described his old boss to me, and it seemed that the terms he used were the ones he would most hope to have applied to himself. "Ralph," he said, "was fearless, incorruptible, idealistic."

Green portrays his entrance into municipal politics basically as an admission of failure. He ran for Congress in 1980, was beaten, ran for Senate in 1986, and was beaten again. In 1989, he was asked by Mayor David Dinkins to become the city's Commissioner of Consumer Affairs. His immediate impulse was to say no, he told me, but then, "in the second

minute, I realized, Well, what am I saving myself for?" At another point in the trip, Green recalled that he had once had a choice between working for Nader and working for Mayor Lindsay. "Thank God I didn't go to work with Lindsay," he deadpanned, "because I might have ended up just, you know, a politician in New York."

DURING his tenure as Public Advocate, Green has held hundreds, quite possibly thousands, of press conferences. A few weeks ago, I went to one that he was conducting at his office, in the Municipal Building, a sort of bureaucratic House of Usher across the street from City Hall. As is so often the case, Green's purpose was to issue a denunciation, in this instance against Oxford Health Plans and its policies toward certain chronically ill patients. Green always likes to have a few victims on hand, and for this particular event he had invited several men with AIDS, who were gloomily arrayed in office chairs, and a woman suffering from multiple sclerosis. When it was her turn to speak at the lectern about her travails, she handed Green her cane.

Green is the city's first Public Advocate and therefore, he likes to point out, the best. Such is the nature of the job

that it is hard to go much past this breezy assessment. In 1989, the Supreme Court ruled that city government's most powerful institution—the Board of Estimate—was illegal, and in the municipal reorganization that followed virtually all the powers of the City Council president were stripped away, even as the position itself was left to linger on, like some befuddled professor emeritus clanking around the faculty lounge. Eventually, the office was renamed, but to many the city's need for such a highly placed, functionally impotent position has never been clear, and the editorial boards of the *Post* and the *News* are among those who still call for its elimination.

In the absence of a clear mandate, Green has defined his office very much in the Nader tradition; under his direction, its main contribution to civic life has been a series of investigative reports and exposés, some concerning truly grave matters and some concerning matters that to most eyes seem less so. Earlier this year, for example, after a two-year legal battle, Green finally forced the Giuliani administration to open up confidential files on police misconduct. His examination revealed that the Police Department routinely failed to discipline officers even after complaints of serious abuse had been substantiated. At the same time, Green has used his post to rail about the disgraceful lack of kosher food at Shea Stadium. The price disparity between men's and women's haircuts has been, for him, a big issue.

Green was elected Public Advocate on November 2, 1993, the same day that Giuliani was elected mayor, and the two have fought, pretty much continuously, ever since, over topics ranging from foster care to campaign-finance law. Green's most recent battle with the Mayor, over the city charter, was, in its mixture of high principle and reflexive antagonism, fairly typical of their interactions. It was clear that Giuliani had wanted to revise the charter in order to prevent Green from inheriting his office, a version of constitutional reform so manifestly inappropriate that the Mayor was eventually forced to back down. Ultimately, the changes he proposed were largely meaningless, and at that point many in the Public Advocate's office advised Green to let the matter drop. But Green fought the



Art Linkletter

"Sorry I'm late. I had a bug."

proposals anyway, both as bad government, which they were, and as a way to punish the Mayor, which he did. "Stop Rudy's power grab!" was how Green put the case to voters, and on Election Day 1999 they turned down the Mayor's plan by a margin of nearly three to one.

Even among Democrats, there are many who are impatient with the Public Advocate's perpetually crusading style. "He comes across like the smartest guy in the class, who wants you to know he's the smartest guy," former Mayor Ed Koch told me. "That is not always the best way to win approbation." Others, speaking not for attribution, were considerably more cutting. "Anything I do is O.K., anything anybody else does doesn't meet my standard" is the way one Democratic operative described Green's approach.

Either out of principle or, perhaps, simply because of his temperament, Green has never had much success forging the kind of quiet alliances that are the basis of political power in New York. No matter what happens in the Senate race, owing to term limits Giuliani will not be eligible to run in the next mayoral election, in 2001, and already several other prominent Democrats are preparing for that campaign, among them the City Comptroller, Alan Hevesi; the City Council speaker, Peter Vallone; and the Bronx Borough president, Fernando Ferrer. Despite the good chance that Green will be the incumbent, a large proportion of the city's political establishment is openly moving to endorse his rivals. This includes not just the county Democratic machines but also the city's major labor unions.

Meanwhile, in the shadow government made up of the city's developers and financial moguls, Green's advance toward the mayoralty is cause for growing alarm. "I think the business community has palpitations," Norman Adler, a prominent New York City lobbyist, told me. Even Green's older brother, Stephen, who is one of the largest owners of commercial property in New York, conceded to me at a real-estate-industry dinner that the impulse of many of his colleagues is to "distrust" Green.

The one place Green's zealotry seems to have made him genuinely

popular is in the city's black community. The Reverend Al Sharpton recalled, for example, that at the African-American Day Parade, in September, the Public Advocate "got a better reception than some of the Harlem politicians." Obviously aware that too much enthusiasm on his part might not be good for Green, Sharpton added, "I don't think he would be a patsy for anybody."

Green's support among blacks and his lack of it among the city's white developers are doubtless related. Giuliani's solution to the difficult task of governing New York has been to deal with only part of the city, to dismiss the notion of a gorgeous mosaic and ignore the consequent resentments. The next mayor, whoever he is, is going to have to address the expectations of those groups which have—not unjustifiably—felt excluded. For Green, this challenge will be all the greater, because if there is one theme that has run through his career it is the demand that government be open and inclusive, even at the expense of order and efficiency.

ON Election Night, while Green was awaiting the results of the charter fight, he invited me to come home with him, calling his wife from the car and urging her to make sure that their fifteen-year-old son, Jonah, had all his clothes on. Green's wife, Deni Frand, is an attractive, petite woman who works in corporate communications. They live on East Ninetieth Street, not far from Gracie Mansion, in a comfortable but by no means grand apartment, with a view of the East River. The décor is an eclectic mix of bold modernism and faded plush, and in the kitchen there is a peace-sign tile above the sink.

Green did not seem particularly nervous about the voting; after eating dinner and watching part of a basketball game, he went into the living room to return a call from his daughter, Jenya, who is a government major at Cornell, just as he was thirty-five years ago. From what I could gather, eavesdropping from the next room, Jenya wanted help from her father on a paper she was writing on the country's swing to the right during the nineteen-seventies. Green took issue with her whole premise, and kept pressing on her a more nu-



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"I always wondered who got my transplant."

anced account of the decade. Nixon, he observed at one point, "talked right but governed left." At another point, he said that the period was "conservative ideologically but liberal operationally."

A few days later, I asked Green about the swing of the country to the right after the nineteen-seventies. Once again, he rejected the premise. "Let me quarrel with the question," he said. "In some ways, the politics and policy of the country have moved right—on welfare, on spending, on regulation—and obviously in other ways they've moved in the other direction: the feminist revolution, the civil-rights revolution, the gay-rights movement."

Green has a pretty clear sense of what it is about his politics that makes people nervous. He knows that he is widely perceived as an ideologue and an anachronism, and he has several responses to this which don't exactly cohere. His natural inclination is to maintain that there is no need for him to refashion himself, even as he goes out of his way to suggest that he *is* refashioning himself. Nowadays, when he talks

about the future of the city, he invariably stresses the importance of continuing to reduce crime and the need to foster new businesses, particularly in Silicon Alley. In what is clearly part of a concerted strategy, his friends all insist on documenting his interest in topics like economic forecasting. Bruce Wasserstein, a prominent investment banker who attended law school with Green, told me that when he and Green get together now what they mostly talk about is systems theory and growth models. "The fact is, Mark is pro-business, which would surprise some people," Wasserstein said.

As Public Advocate, Green has done well for himself playing the part of Giuliani's chief antagonist, but this, too, is a role that he is now trying to get beyond. He maintains that it is ridiculous to claim that he is merely the anti-Giuliani, and says that this caricature is a confection of his enemies. Yet, in the process of doing so, he is drawn inexorably back to what he likes to do best, which is criticize the Mayor. "It is self-servingly glib for them to say I'm his exact opposite merely because I've been

the person who's most often stood up to him," he told me. "I'll tell you one way I am his opposite. I believe more in a mayor's being a quarterback of teamwork as opposed to just despotically governing by enemies list."

Talking to Green one day in his office, I asked him what was the very first thing he would do upon becoming mayor. He made me rephrase the question, saying that to answer it would be "pretentious." He went on to say, "The first thing the *next* mayor should do is to do a municipal Andrew Jackson and take down the barriers and open the gates and the doors to City Hall. That's both a policy and a metaphor." His point was clear enough, but he couldn't help adding, "This city deserves a mayor of New York and not a mayor of Singapore."

Green is still very much in the process of working out his account of where he believes the city ought to be headed. Over the last few weeks, he has been giving a speech in which he identifies five key issues—education, health care, the Internet economy, race relations, and police misconduct—and calls vaguely for smaller class sizes, more responsive H.M.O.s, and better understanding between people of different colors. His formula for dealing with the Giuliani legacy, when he remembers to be politic, is that the next mayor "should build on the Mayor's proven successes yet go beyond his proven failures."

Green has said that he will spend the next year campaigning hard to elect Hillary Clinton, and, to his credit, it is not at all difficult to imagine him doing so. As he observed, "Certainly after this charter-reform fight, no one could convincingly say I'm pulling my punches with the Mayor in the tawdry hope that he wins and I succeed him."

In the meantime, Green has set up a committee for his own race in 2001, and contributions are steadily streaming in, many from people who have never given to him before. Green appears to be gratified by his new fund-raising promise, though, along with his mounting pile of invitations and ever more crowded schedule, it is equivocal evidence of his status. By the perverse logic of his situation, Green's future is so bound up with that of his nemesis that the degree to which he is now being taken seriously in New York politics is just the same as the degree to which he is not. ♦

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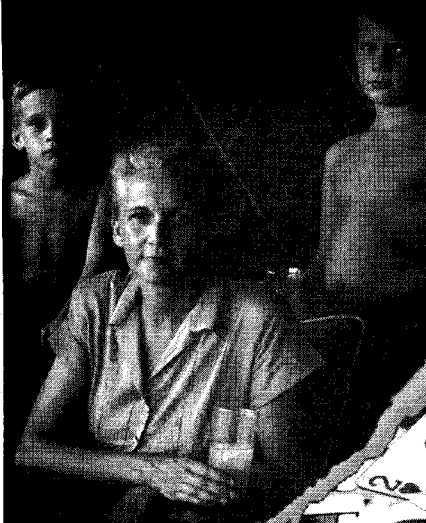


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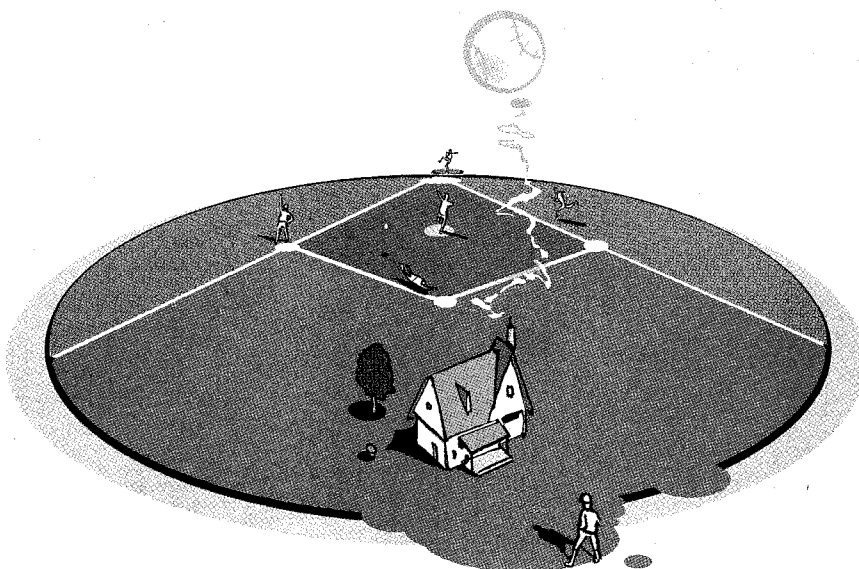


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BY PETER RICHMOND



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So, first off, Ken, I want to thank you for talking with us, especially on such a special day for the Griffey family, and, well, for the whole baseball family at large.

"No problem."

Let's get right to it, then. I understand you've made a decision about where you've agreed to be traded.

"That's right."

And the lucky franchise is...

"Kansas City."

Kansas City, Missouri?

"Right. The Kansas City Royals."

Uh-huh. Well. Congratulations.

"Thank you. The whole family's pretty excited."

I'll bet they are. Kansas City! Wow. It's sort of a surprise, is all. I mean, I think everybody thought you'd probably choose a big-market team like the Braves that could pay you hundreds of millions of dollars.

"They did? Well, it was all pretty much a no-brainer on my end. The Royals were really nice."

Nice?

"They wrote me a personal letter on the official team letterhead, about how they weren't as wealthy as some teams but they were still trying their darnedest to win. They said they hoped I'd pay them a visit. So I did, and when

I got there everyone in the offices had pictures of their kids on their desks, and little personal touches, like snow-globes."

Sounds very pleasant.

"Then George Brett took me to play miniature golf, and we went for some barbecue. Then he introduced me to his dry cleaner, and took me to the hardware store. It made me feel right at home."

Was it a difficult negotiation?

"Not at all. We worked out a deal right then. In exchange for me, the Royals are going to send the Mariners their top three players."

And who would that be?

"Honestly, I don't know. I don't know anyone who plays for Kansas City. Do you? ... Didn't they used to have Steve Balboni, that bald first baseman?"

And then there was U. L. Washington.

"Also, I like their uniforms. They haven't added black to their color scheme yet. And I kind of like the name Royals. Plus those fountains at the ballpark. I always loved that plashing sound behind me in center field."

Any other reasons?

"To be truthful, on a personal level, I think the Braves are boring, don't you?"

Oh, yeah. Worse than boring. I hate them.

ISTVAN BANYAI

"They did make a generous offer, I have to admit."

How much?

"Well, Ted Turner owns a lot of land in Montana—most of the state now, apparently—and he told my agent he could swing a deal where he could probably get the rest of it, and give me the whole state. But he never wrote me personally, like the Royals did."

So can the Royals afford you?

"Oh, yeah. I wasn't asking much. I'm too rich anyway, and it's not healthy. I live in this community in Orlando with other wealthy athletes and designer attack dogs. That's no way to raise kids, if you think about it."

I never thought about it that way.

"George showed me this nice Victorian in Kansas City with a porch swing. It's sort of a fixer-upper. Parking might be a problem, because I have seven cars, but the yard is a whole half-acre and there's this huge old maple tree. So as soon as I saw that tree, I was hooked. I asked the Royals what they could pay me, and they told me exactly how much, and I said that was fine."

And that was, like, how much?

"A hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars a year, for two years, guaranteed. With incentives. Another ten thousand if I hit eighty home runs."

Isn't that below the league minimum?

Yeah, but the union waived it for me.

That's still a lot of money. To be frank, some people thought you'd sign the first two-hundred-million-dollar contract in baseball, whereas this means you'll get... let's see... two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

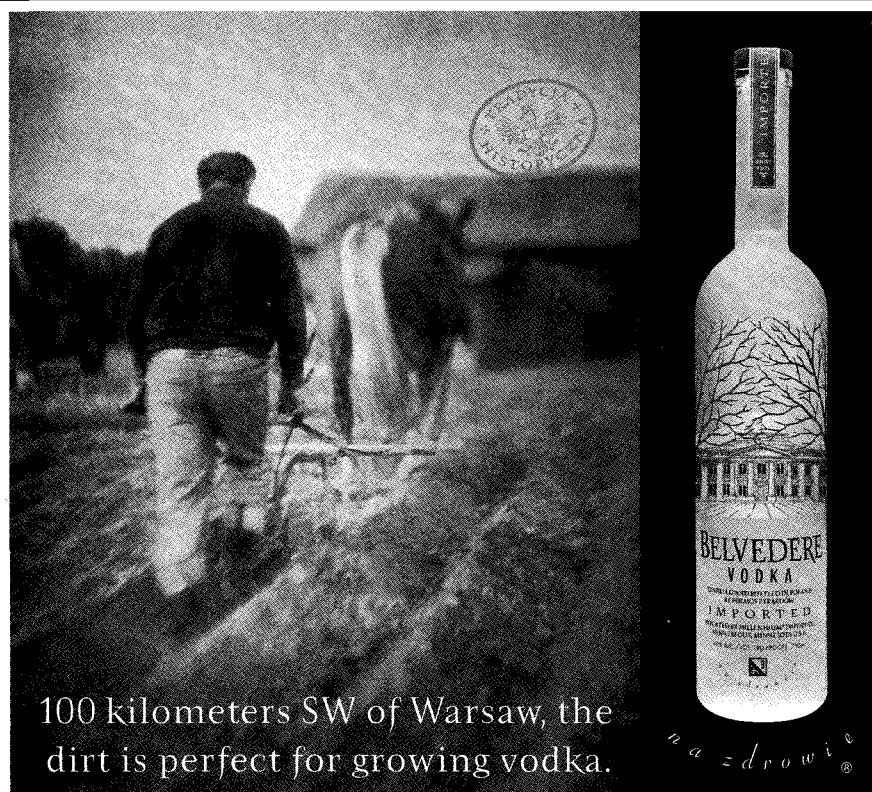
"Well, they told me that if they paid me any more they might not be able to afford both home and away uniforms next year. They'd have to have just one or the other."

Wow. And a lot of people thought you'd only agree to be traded to a team that had a chance of winning the World Series.

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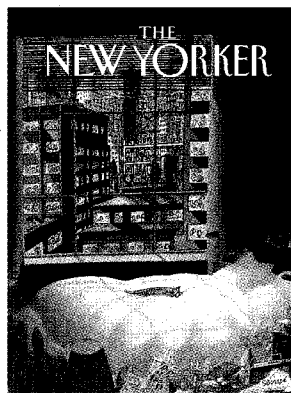
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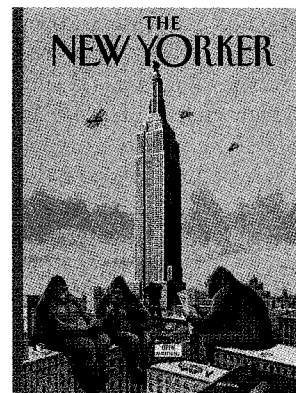
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SEX, DRUGS, AND FIDDLELING

Is the Celtic virtuoso Ashley MacIsaac too wild for rock and roll?

BY REBECCA MEAD

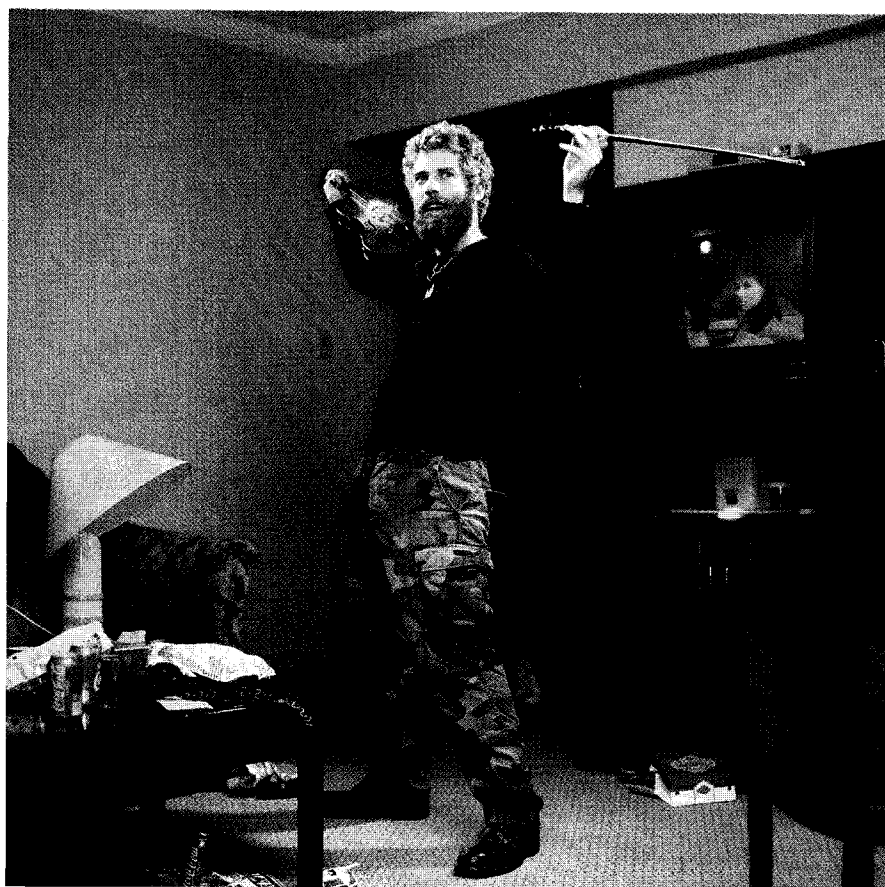
ALTHOUGH wrecking a hotel room is standard rock-star behavior, it is unusual for the instrument of destruction to be a bucketful of freshly cooked lobsters. Such unlikely use of crustaceans is among the many ways in which Ashley MacIsaac, a punk fiddle player from Nova Scotia, sets himself apart from other popular musicians, as I discovered one afternoon last spring, in Room 2018 of the Westin Hotel in Ottawa. The bathroom looked like the site of a lobster massacre: the walls and the floor and the mirror were spattered with bits of shell and stray gobbets of flesh. The tub was swimming with crushed ice cubes and the pink, poking antennae and tails of a dozen or so submerged sea creatures. In the toilet bowl, straw-thin legs floated listlessly. MacIsaac—who is on the short side, and built like a laborer, with sinewy arms and powerful legs—was standing by the sink in dirty black pants and an orange camouflage T-shirt, stamping vigorously with the heel of his battered leather boot on a fluffy white bath towel, before unfurling it to reveal smashed lobster body parts. He then called room service, and within a few minutes a waiter bearing mayonnaise and bread and salt and pepper was stepping gingerly over discarded T-shirts and scraps of paper, and sniffing the air, which reeked of brine and marijuana. MacIsaac mixed the mayo with lobster meat in an ice bucket, then smeared the results on a roll and offered it to me. He is unfailingly generous—he'll give a seven-dollar tip on a three-dollar cab fare—and since I had already declined several invitations to join him in smoking pot, it seemed churlish to turn down a lobster roll on the ground that its preparation was insufficiently sanitary, so I ate. It was pretty good.

MacIsaac, who is twenty-four years old, comes from the island of Cape Breton, off the northern coast of Nova Scotia. Cape Breton is one of those places around which it is impossible to

drive without imagining that you are in an automobile commercial. It is rich with pine-covered peaks and rugged cliffs and miles of deserted beaches; the barely trafficked roads are edged with hardy fishing villages, each comprising little more than a few score clapboard houses and a church. The island was

heard in Scotland. These days, fiddle players perform every weekend at square dances in the village halls dotting the green, still countryside of the island.

MacIsaac is a prodigal talent in Cape Breton's musical tradition. Before his voice broke, he was a local celebrity, step-dancing and fiddling at square dances. By the time he was in his mid-teens, he had developed a vigorous style of playing, and his clarity and fluency rivalled the old-time masters of the genre. MacIsaac's first album, "Close to the Floor," which he recorded in 1992, when he was only sixteen, demonstrated that proficiency. Within a couple of years, he had splashily extended his range, and a subsequent album, "Hi How Are You Today?," re-



The fiddler: "I want to do what people expect from me. And that is not Ashley MacIsaac not on drugs, that is Ashley MacIsaac on drugs." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

settled two hundred years ago by Scottish emigrants, to whom the hills and the heaths of the place were a vivid reminder of the land they had left behind. Those Scots settlers also brought their music with them—their jigs and reels and strathspeys—and it evolved in Cape Breton into a distinct musical strain, more energetic and less polite than the traditional music that is usually

leased in 1995, married the old tunes with techniques from MTV—thrashing punk guitars and mesmerizing dance beats and nifty, witty samples, along with MacIsaac's rollicking fiddle. He even sang on a couple of tracks, in an off-key, ragged voice. The album, which generated a hit single, "Sleepy Maggie," a reworking of a traditional tune in which MacIsaac's fiddle playing slides under and around the

SABA

ethereal Gaelic vocals of Mary Jane Lamond, was a phenomenal success in Canada, selling three hundred thousand copies. Because MacIsaac wore his hair in a Mohawk and liked to go onstage in a kilt and combat boots, he appealed to young people whose tastes ran to alternative music or hip-hop. But he also sold records to the grandmothers of those fans, and he has champions among the musical elite. Philip Glass, who has a home in Cape Breton and has become a friend and a supporter of MacIsaac's, compares his powers of innovation to those of Ornette Coleman. "Ashley grew up in a very complete kind of musical world and began learning at a very early age, but it is his own particular talent that has set him apart," Glass told me recently. "These are gifts that come from somewhere else. There are a lot of good players in Cape Breton, but even in a musical culture that is extraordinary he stands out."

THE phenomenon of the prodigy can be seen in all the arts, but the phenomenon of the prodigy who struggles to deliver on his early promise is especially widespread in popular music, which relies upon putting onstage young people whose talent exceeds their maturity, and whose very rawness and inexperience constitutes much of their appeal. In the years since Ashley MacIsaac's debut, his career has quieted down noticeably, and his appearance last spring in Ottawa, at an AIDS benefit, was something of a rarity. The day before the show, MacIsaac and I took a walk, and out on the street, which was clean and orderly in the best Canadian tradition, he seemed like a scruffy lord of misrule, somewhere between the Pied Piper and Pig Pen. Just down the road from the Parliament Buildings, a homeless man asked for some change. MacIsaac handed over a twenty-dollar bill and, flipping open a silver cigarette case, a gram of pot. ("I love you, man," the bum groaned, embracing him.) MacIsaac enjoys being recognized, and if he's not being recognized he wants at least to be noticed. When he saw a group protesting the United States' bombing of Yugoslavia later that day, he started bellowing "Death to Serbia!" at the top of his voice, to the consternation of protesters and passersby alike. Still later, as we walked by the canal that runs through the center of Ottawa,

he charmed a pair of wary young student types into lending us their canoe by offering them twenty dollars and, for security, his passport. "Are you Ashley MacIsaac?" one of them asked tentatively as we paddled away from the bank. "Check my passport!" he yelled.

His appearance onstage the next night likewise seemed to be the product of a barely controlled chaos. MacIsaac was scheduled to appear at around ten-thirty, and when he got to his dressing room, at six, he rummaged in his pockets and drew out a folded piece of silver paper. "Fuck, I thought I lost my acid," he said, then put a tab ostentatiously on the tip of his tongue before swallowing. He smoked a couple of joints, got out his fiddle, and started to play traditional Cape Breton tunes. He played for fifteen or twenty minutes without stopping, and the rich, dense music echoed off the mirrors and swirled in the air as he segued from one intricate reel into another, his fingers never missing a note. Then the rest of his band showed up—a spoons player, a guitarist, and MacIsaac's younger sister, Lisa, who also plays the fiddle—and MacIsaac smoked some more pot, and did high kicks in the middle of the dressing room to warm himself up, then took another hit of acid and smoked some more pot, and then went onstage.

He had on the same black pants that he'd worn the night before, stained with lobster juice, and a blue T-shirt I'd seen lying on the floor of his room, and a pair of pink-tinted glasses. As he began, he held his fiddle down at a forty-five-degree angle, as if he were trying to drive it into the ground. He stamped his foot furiously, and scraped so hard with his bow that "Sleepy Maggie" sounded like a wild beast. He pirouetted while he played, and kicked his feet into the air before him, and after the second tune the horsehair on his bow started to fly off in wisps. At the end of the short set, he shook his head so wildly that his glasses fell off, and he crushed them underfoot; then he hurled his burned-through bow into the cheering crowd.

MACISAAC'S transformation from a folk-music prodigy into a rock star began one summer evening in 1992, in the hamlet of South West Margaree, in Cape Breton. MacIsaac, who had just entered his senior year of high school, was playing at a square

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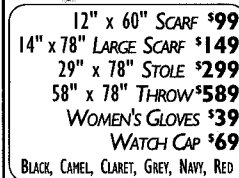
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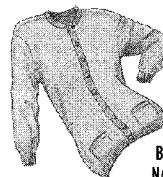
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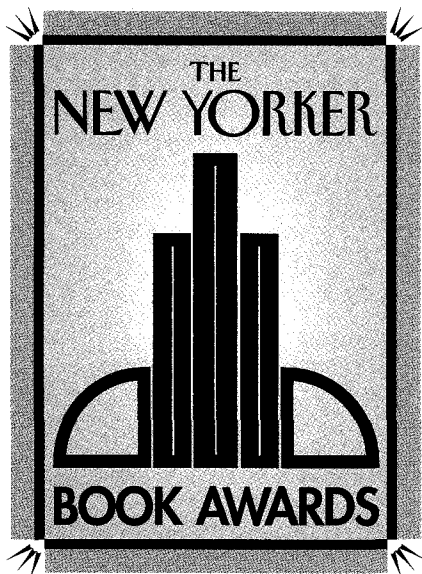
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THE SECRET OF THE YELLOW ROOM

Sloth's best. Lolling on a sofa
In a Chinese dressing gown
With the windows open in the heat,
The breeze rousing the leaves.
The flies dozing on the ceiling.

The silky hush of a summer afternoon,
Like floating on one's back
With eyes closed in some pond
Clogged with water lilies,
Inhaling their scent as they nuzzle close.

The light and shade dillydallying,
The leaves sighing again.
Afterward, not even that.
Majestic stupor. Stirring only at midnight
To click on the yellow table lamp.

—CHARLES SIMIC

dance, and in the audience was JoAnne Akalaitis, the New York theatre director, who has a home on the island.

"I felt I was seeing something I had never seen before," Akalaitis told me. "I had been living in Cape Breton a long time, and I appreciate all the talent that is on the island, but he kicked it up. Nobody plays in such a physical, demonic way; nobody engages his body the way Ashley does. There is a kind of harshness, a volcanic ambience to his performance of the music. I was in a state of meltdown. I thought, This is a great performance."

Akalaitis was about to stage a production of Büchner's "Woyzeck" at the Public Theatre, in New York, for which Philip Glass was composing the music; she invited MacIsaac to participate. His mother at first disapproved of the idea. "I said, 'No way,'" Carmelita MacIsaac told me when I visited her and Angus MacIsaac, Ashley's father, in Cape Breton. Carmelita and Angus, who is a retired electrician, live in a village called Creignish, just over the causeway from the mainland, in the same bungalow in which MacIsaac grew up. On the living-room wall hang his gold records; a cabinet is filled with trophies and recording-industry awards; displayed with equal pride is a fresh-faced high-school graduation portrait. "Some people were saying, 'Let him go, you're holding him back,'" Carmelita recalled. "Other people were saying, 'You're crazy, don't let

him go down there; he's only seventeen, and he is going to lose his music.' And I said, 'Ashley will never lose his music.'"

In the end, MacIsaac went, and was transported. All he knew of New York was what he had learned from reading occasional copies of the *Village Voice*, which he could buy in Halifax, three hours' drive from his home. He got his first taste of celebrity at Newark Airport, where a limousine picked him up and ferried him into town, and soon he was in the heart of Manhattan's haute avant-garde, teaching members of Akalaitis's cast to step-dance, and witnessing the artist's life at close quarters. Akalaitis had arranged for him to stay at Philip Glass's apartment, and MacIsaac listened to the composer practice, though he had no idea of Glass's significance in contemporary music. "This apartment had seventeen hundred manuscripts in it, and there was one with, like, twelve hundred pages," MacIsaac told me. "I looked at what it was called—'Einstein on the Beach'—and I decided I would take page five hundred because that would be a cool souvenir. I realized afterward that I had better put it back."

"I don't think he'd ever seen a play before," Akalaitis said. "He didn't have a clue who we were. And he didn't know who David Byrne was, when we took David to see him once. But he learned quickly, and he was curious, and greedy, and interested." MacIsaac developed a following among his patrons' friends:

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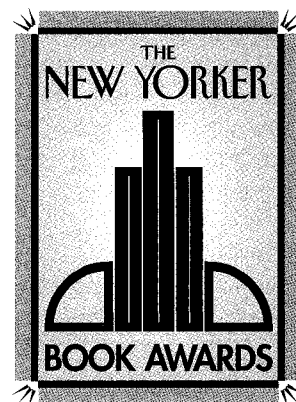
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"And will you, Lee, take Mimi for granted as long as you both shall live?"

one day, Paul Simon came around to see Glass, and MacIsaac played for him; Simon's wife, Edie Brickell, included him on her next album.

Although MacIsaac had been dropping in on the small gay community in Halifax since getting his driver's license, at sixteen, he was still half in the closet in Cape Breton. In New York, he suddenly found himself in a very gay crowd. "The first time he arrived at the theatre, all the company was sitting there, and he said to the manager, 'Are there any homosexual people here?'" Akalaitis recalls. "The company manager said, 'Yeah, about fifty per cent of them.' I think that was stimulating to him. That year, I remember looking out the window at the Halloween parade, and there was Ashley, at the head of the parade. He embraced a certain franticness of New York." He did so around the clock, vanishing off to night clubs after the curtain fell at the Public Theatre. "I was a club kid," MacIsaac says. "I went to the Limelight every night. I got laid a lot. I was considered a cute little boy."

Before MacIsaac left Cape Breton, he had been a quiet student who practiced the fiddle eight hours a day. When he returned home, after four months in New York, he had undergone a transformation. To the neighbors who heard of his New York exploits, he might as well have been visiting Sodom and Gomorrah. "I didn't have any real vision of my being a cool kid," MacIsaac said. "All of a sudden, I became this guy who was onstage, the entertainer." He was eager to advance his career, so he found himself a manager, Sheri Jones, who was based in Halifax.

His goals weren't specific, but his ambition was enormous. "He would say, 'I want to be rich and famous. I want to make money, and own a house on Cape Breton,'" Jones told me. "I realized that we could put a rock band behind him and it would appeal to kids. Ashley has that star quality that very few people have." Jones showcased MacIsaac at an industry event in Newfoundland in February of 1994. "Everybody had been saying, 'What are you going to do with

a traditional fiddler?'" Jones says. "Then, the minute he hit the stage, people I had known for twenty years were all over me."

MacIsaac signed with A&M Records, and went on the road, touring with such mainstream artists as the Chieftains and Sarah McLachlan and Melissa Etheridge. He got excellent reviews for his quicksilver fiddling, and soon forged an outrageous public persona: step-dancing on Conan O'Brien's show wearing nothing under his kilt; loudly telling interviewers that he was a "fiddle slut" who liked hearing Courtney Love sing about heroin. During breaks from touring, MacIsaac was also recording, and in 1995 he released "Hi How Are You Today?," with its bizarre mixing of traditional and modern sounds.

Cape Breton purists criticized MacIsaac for messing with the music, and he defended himself aggressively. "Celts were the original punks," he told one interviewer. Unlike, say, the recordings made in the early nineties by American hip-hop producers who sampled jazz riffs, MacIsaac's music was a true fusion of new and old, and he knew the old as well as anyone. (In response to critics who accused him of corrupting his heritage with "Hi How Are You Today?," he released a traditional album, "Fine Thank You Very Much," on which he played old tunes in the differing styles of well-known Cape Breton fiddlers.) Even with a hit CD, MacIsaac was something of a naïf when it came to popular music; it was his producers who engineered many of the innovations on "Hi How Are You Today?" But the spirit of the album was pure MacIsaac, and its reception among the mainstream audience was ecstatic. In 1995, he pulled off an unusual feat by winning two Juno awards, which are Canada's equivalent of the Grammys, in the categories of best new solo artist *and* best roots and traditional album. That's a little like the winner of the Oscar for best short documentary walking off with the best-picture prize as well.

STARDOM requires not just virtuosity but presence, and MacIsaac is extravagantly endowed with both. He has the swagger of a star, too. The first time we met, he picked me up at my hotel in a rented white stretch limo. He sat in the back seat like a prince, smoking a

joint and holding forth on his plans for further fame.

In front of a rock audience, MacIsaac exhibits an air of edgy danger, and he is vividly, violently physical, disturbingly sexy. Like Kurt Cobain, or Shane MacGowan, formerly of the Pogues, MacIsaac is transfixing because you are never sure when he is going to spin out of control.

Even in the tiny church halls in which he plays in Cape Breton, he seems klieg-lit. I saw him at a square dance in the hamlet of Glencoe Mills one day last summer: the place felt no bigger than a tennis court, and there were slices of home-baked cakes and bottles of soda for sale, and a loud ventilator fan cranking in the corner, and hundreds of people cramming in to watch and dance. On the handkerchief-size stage was Maybelle Chisholm, a legendary Cape Breton pianist, whose upper arms quivered as she pounded the keys, and MacIsaac sat next to her, all in black, with a studded belt and dark glasses, fiddling. He looked as if his coccyx had been fastened to his chair and the rest of him set in perpetual motion: his legs pumped and his arms sawed and his body swooped and his mouth hung agape and sweat dripped off him; it was clear that he was made for bigger places than this.

These traits insured that as soon as MacIsaac became famous he also became infamous. In 1996, *McClean's* selected him to be on its annual honor roll of worthy Canadians, and he managed to get himself struck from the list by telling one of the magazine's writers about his underage boyfriend and his fondness for a particular sexual practice involving micturation. (The magazine ended up running a disapproving article that reprimanded MacIsaac for his "stunning recklessness about his image.") His exorbitant nature became even more apparent after he began to make money. (He says he earned three million Canadian dollars for "Hi How Are You Today?") He bought a house in Cape Breton and started to renovate it in classic rock-star style—a sunken Jacuzzi, a bed on a circular platform. On the road, he would rack up huge hotel bills. One night on tour, MacIsaac's dinner companions insisted on picking

up the tab, refusing his proffered fifty-dollar bill: MacIsaac stuffed the money into his mouth and ate it. Then, there was all the money that he was increasingly spending on drugs, including acid and mushrooms.

MacIsaac believes that drugs are an important element of his success. He doesn't have to be high to perform, he says, but he prefers to be. "The people who are paying to see me like it better when I'm high," he once told me. "It is a sad fact. I am not addicted, and I don't need to do it, but sometimes I have to, because I want to go out onstage and do what people expect to see from me. And that is not Ashley MacIsaac not on drugs, that is Ashley MacIsaac on drugs." Those around him saw what was going on, but no one did anything about it. Sheri Jones, who was his manager at that point, recalls that every time she got a phone call late at night she feared the worst about MacIsaac.

"HI HOW ARE YOU TODAY?" had coincided with a revival of interest in things Celtic, from Frank McCourt to "Riverdance." It seemed possible that MacIsaac's successful record might be a one-off oddity, and he wasn't sure how to follow it up. He loved being a pop star, but he kept going into the studio, failing to produce anything A&M liked, and dropping out of sight.



He was bored with touring, and in the spring of 1997 he disappointed his record company by backing out of a series of engagements in the United States. A year later, he returned to Cape Breton for a show, and, instead of playing his familiar songs, he stood onstage in a hooded sweatshirt, fiddle in hand, and rapped, badly, at the audience. When he trashed his trailer at a festival, Sheri Jones stopped representing him. After that, according to MacIsaac, he did nothing much except shuttle between Cape Breton and Toronto and take drugs, including crack cocaine. "I had enough money to enjoy myself, and I just went with it," he said. "I got pretty whacked out." Soon he was at the end of the money he had earned from "Hi How Are You Today?" About a year ago, he hit bottom. "I found myself walking down the street after two days of being up at four in the morning," he told me.

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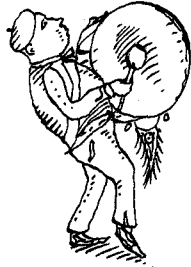
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"I was walking with crackheads, smoking off some dirty old crack pipe, and when I got back to my hotel room and took off my shoes I was covered in blisters. I couldn't stand up. I said, This is fucking disgusting, and I got very emotionally distraught and called my parents. They said, Everything is O.K., come home, so I went home for Christmas, and everything has semi-cleared since then. Semi-cleared. Because if it was completely clear, it would be boring." But his reformation did not make relations with the record company any smoother. At the beginning of 1999, A&M was bought by Universal, and although MacIsaac went back into the studio this spring, he still failed to come up with anything that was sufficiently commercial. He started agitating to be released from his contract.



When I visited MacIsaac's parents in Cape Breton in June, they seemed to be enormously proud of him—his mother scurried to find an Ashley MacIsaac T-shirt and cap for me—and to be exceedingly defensive on his behalf. Angus MacIsaac said, "The last year, he more or less laid back, and now what he needs to do is get a recording out there and make some money. I think it will build his confidence, too." I warily broached the issue of MacIsaac's drug use—a Canadian magazine called *Frank* had published an interview with him a week or two earlier in which he had talked about smoking crack—and Carmelita MacIsaac became indignant. "I find some of the media will only put the garbage in," she said. "I went in the store one time and saw all these magazines with all this garbage in them, and I bought three or four of them and ripped them up right in the girl's face."

Even as MacIsaac brags to the press about his erratic behavior, it's never entirely clear whether his spinning out of control is actually part of the performance. When he was just nineteen years old, he told the Ottawa *Citizen*, "I don't think my gift is music at all. I think my gift is the power of marketing." For all his skill and his innovation, it often seems as if MacIsaac had concluded that notoriety will sustain him further than talent. He happily volunteers details about his sexual history: he has, on more than one occasion, boasted about the

four years he spent with a sixteen-year-old boyfriend, a triumph over the laws of mathematics as well as over the pitfalls of romance, and the first time I visited him he told me how he met his first real boyfriend—a porn star, he said—at a "Big Dick" contest at the Limelight, in Manhattan. He has called himself the Antichrist. He has used aggressive pronouncements about his sexuality to offend not only the blue-rinsed portion of his musical admirers but also members of the gay community, who have been upset by his assertions that although he has had boyfriends, he might end up going straight and getting married. MacIsaac's list of transgressions is exhaustive, and exhausting.

His high public profile hasn't always bolstered his success. After his statements in *McClean's*, his bookings for corporate gigs—the ones in which artists actually make money—and opportunities for commercial endorsements dropped off dramatically. This kind of routine self-sabotage betrayed MacIsaac's deep ambivalence toward his pop-star role. If you ask him about the music he plays, and what it means to him, he tends to deflect the question and bluster about his desire to make money. You get the sense that he'd much rather discuss his sex life—real or imagined—than his musical one, as if his true private life were the one he conducts with his fiddle.

ONE Friday afternoon last July, MacIsaac and I drove from Halifax to Cape Breton. At the airport, he stood out among the tourists and business travellers. He was dressed all in black, was wearing dark glasses, and was carrying a large purple fiddle case, and he wore a peculiar safari hat that sat oddly high on his head. In the car, he took off the hat, and inside was a thick wad of Canadian dollar bills.

The previous day, he told me, he had signed a record deal with Andrew McCain, the chairman of a large Canadian food company who also owns a small independent label called Loggerhead Records. For weeks, MacIsaac had been trying to get out of his contract with Universal, and he had finally slipped free. (To accomplish this, he had walked into the company's offices and demanded a million dollars; when Universal refused,

MacIsaac trashed the place.) He had approached McCain, who suggested that he go into rehab, but MacIsaac said that wasn't necessary. Loggerhead, whose recordings are distributed by Universal, had agreed to pay him a hundred thousand dollars, half of which he would get when the record came out and half of which the company gave him in cash. He said he had forty thousand dollars in his hat and in his pockets. I asked what had happened to the other ten.

"Well, five of it is on my finger," he said, and flashed a gigantic, hideous gold signet ring bearing a Mercedes-Benz symbol. He had stashed some of it under his bed. Several hundred had gone on taxi fares and big tips. Some of it had gone on what he said was a gambling game he'd been playing the previous night, in which he would ask someone to cut a deck of cards and then give that person the face value of the card, multiplied by ten, in dollars. Because it's impossible to listen to MacIsaac for long without wanting to impart financial advice, I said something responsible about how he had forty thousand dollars to last him until Christmas. "I don't know whether it's going to last me until Monday," he said.

When I saw MacIsaac a couple of months later, the ring was gone—someone had stolen it from his apartment, he said—and instead he was wearing a smaller version bearing the imprint of a dollar sign. I didn't ask about the forty thousand dollars. We were at a recording studio in Toronto, where he was laying down the final vocal and fiddle tracks on what was to be his new album for Loggerhead, "Helter's Celtic." (It came out last month in Canada to good reviews, but so far no company has signed on to release it in this country.) MacIsaac had just flown to Toronto from Ireland, where he had been recording with the Chieftains; this evening, he was working on a remake of Hank Snow's country ballad "I'm Movin' On," which his new producer, Justin Gray, had turned into a hard-rock squall. "You've done this much without me; I'm sure you can finish without me," MacIsaac said good-naturedly to Gray as he entered the recording booth with a lyric sheet in his hand. He stripped off his shirt, so that he looked like a satyr slightly run to seed, and started singing into the mike, wildly off key.

"How completely, bizarrely out of tune am I?" he asked Gray.

"It doesn't bother me," Gray answered. "The track is so far from the original already."

MacIsaac took repeated passes through the song; then he took his fiddle into the recording booth and played it over the Kiss-like backing track, an escalation through a scale here, a shimmering eddy of notes there. Then, for the next couple of hours, Gray sorted through the digital recordings of the vocals, trying to find enough good phrases among the repeated bum notes to build a single decent rendition of the song. MacIsaac seemed embarrassed that so much effort was being expended on his behalf, but he sat quietly and let the sound engineer do his work.

"No matter how many people you piss off, there are always more people who don't know that you pissed the other people off," MacIsaac told me at around four-thirty that morning, as we drove into downtown Toronto. We were in a 1971 Cougar that MacIsaac had recently acquired: it had no heat, and rattled alarmingly, and we were dangerously low on gas. I asked him whether he liked

what the new producer had done. He was unenthusiastic but sanguine. "It has been doctored from what I initially set out for it to be, and the approach on the whole thing is a lot less edgy," he said. "The record company decided to try and make it radio-friendly, and I don't know if it was the right choice, but I gave them the O.K. to do it."

He seemed to be dealing with the pressure of being expected to deliver a smash-hit followup by insisting that he wasn't even attempting to match his earlier success. "If this record comes out and sells fifty thousand copies, which it will, it won't be a failure," he said. "It will be a fucking gold record. It will accomplish something, which is to hold me over for another six months, and give me some public persona in this country, so that I can look like I haven't been too much of a crackheaded fool. It will give me the space to go on and do more stuff, and give me the time, and that is pretty much all I was looking for." The *next* record, he was suggesting, would be the one he really wanted to make. What it might contain he wasn't sure: mostly, he said, he

wanted to shut himself in a studio and work privately, "so that I can be as fucked up and freaky and as prima donna as I want." And he still hoped to make some kind of recording with Philip Glass, who had invited him to perform with him the following week in Ann Arbor.

Then MacIsaac veered off into one of his outrage riffs. He told me how he'd fantasized about pretending to die, then having a sex change and coming back to Cape Breton as a prodigal girl fiddle player who played just like Ashley MacIsaac. He said he'd like to find a new place to live, other than Cape Breton. "I am happy to be there," he said. "But it's hard to be as maniacal as I would like to be at home when everybody knows me. There are definitely some things that aren't in Cape Breton that are in my life at this point, like harems of naked boys in India, say.

"So I haven't decided where I will go," he said, as the car shook perilously, and the gas gauge slipped beyond empty. "And actually, at the moment, I can't do it. But soon, I think, I am going to become weirder than Michael Jackson." ♦

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PERSONAL HISTORY

BRILLIANT LIGHT

A chemical boyhood.

BY OLIVER SACKS

Something has got into me these last weeks—I do not know why. I have pulled out my old books (and bought many new ones), have set the little tungsten bar on a pedestal and papered the kitchen with chemical charts. I read lists of cosmic abundances in the bath. On cold, dismal Saturday afternoons, there is nothing better than curling up with a fat volume of Thorpe's Dictionary of Applied Chemistry, opening it anywhere, and reading at random. It was Uncle Tungsten's favorite book, and now it is one of mine. On depressive mornings, I like to work out atomic radii or ionization potentials with my Grape-Nuts—their charm has come back, and they will get me going for the day.

I—BEFORE THE WAR

MANY of my childhood memories are of metals: these seemed to exert a power on me from the start. They stood out, conspicuous against the heterogeneousness of the world, by their shining, gleaming quality, their silveriness, their smoothness and weight. They seemed cool to the touch, and they rang when they were struck.

I also loved the yellowness, the heaviness of gold. My mother would take the wedding ring from her finger and let me handle it for a while, as she told me of its inviolacy, how it never tarnished. "Feel how heavy it is," she would add. "It's even heavier than lead." I knew what lead was, for I had handled the heavy, soft piping the plumber had left behind one year. Gold was soft, too, my mother told me, so it was usually combined with another metal to make it harder.

It was the same with copper—people mixed it with tin to produce bronze. Bronze! The very word was like a trumpet to me, for battle was the brave clash of bronze upon bronze, bronze spears on bronze shields, the great shield of

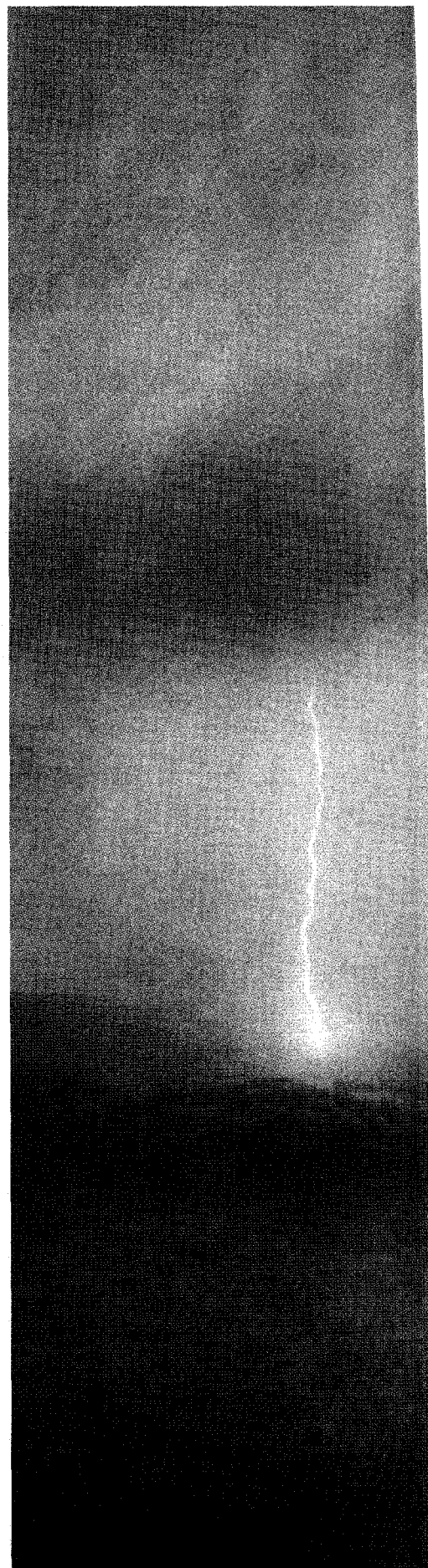
Achilles. Or you could alloy copper with zinc, my mother said, to produce brass. All of us—my mother, my brothers, and I—had our own brass menorahs for Hanukkah. (My father, though, had a silver one.)

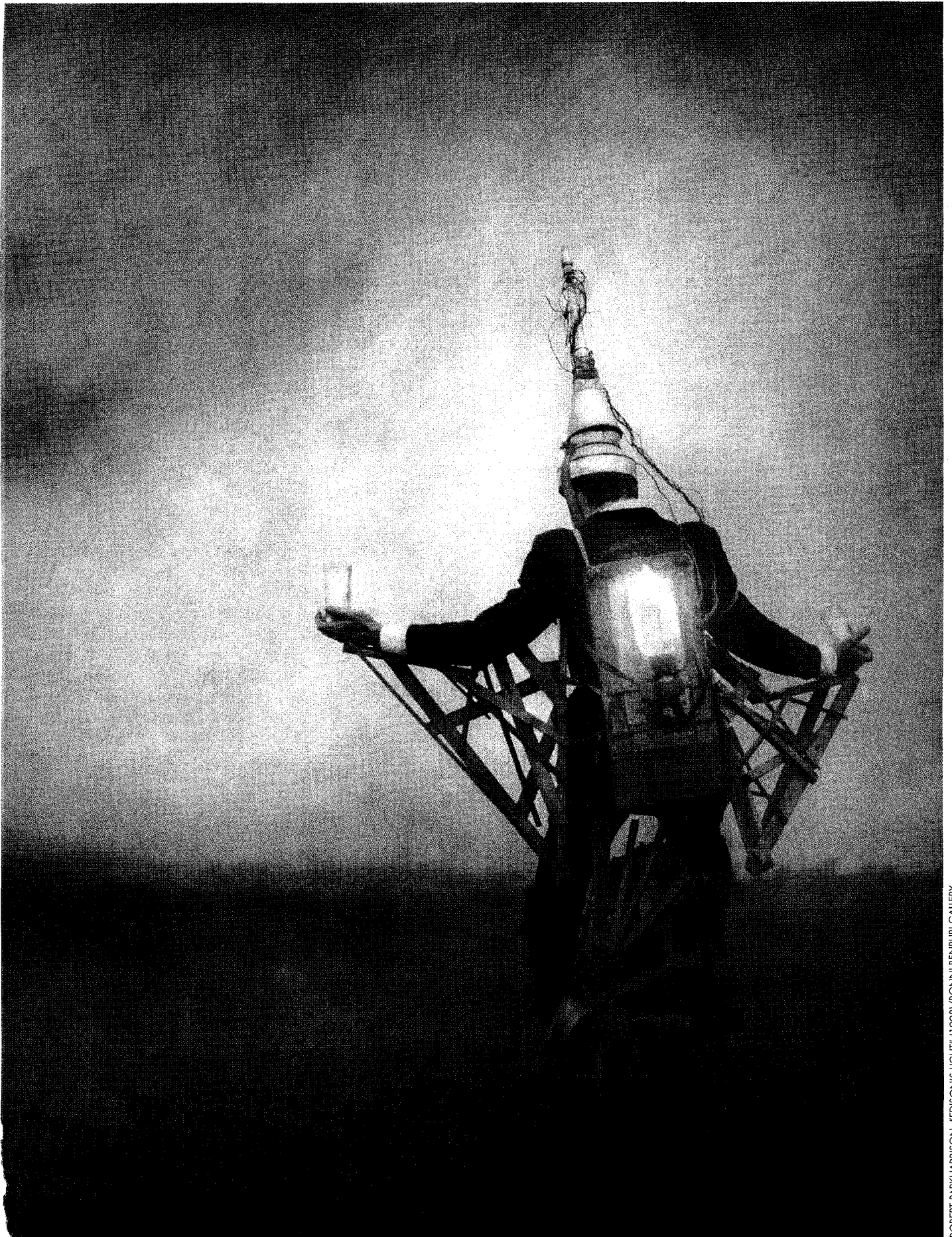
I knew copper, the shiny rose color of the great copper cauldron in our kitchen—it was taken down only once a year, when the quinces and crab apples were ripe in the garden and my mother would stew them to make jelly.

I knew zinc—the dull, slightly bluish birdbath in the garden was made of zinc—and tin, from the heavy tinfoil in which sandwiches were wrapped for a picnic. My mother showed me that when tin or zinc was bent it uttered a special "cry." "It's due to deformation of the crystal structure," she said, forgetting that I was five and could not understand her—and yet her words made me want to know more.

There was an enormous cast-iron lawn roller out in the garden—it weighed five hundred pounds, my father said. We, as children, could hardly budge it, but he was immensely strong and could lift it off the ground. It was always slightly rusty, and this bothered me, for the rust flaked off, leaving little cavities and scabs, and I was afraid the whole roller might corrode and fall apart one day, reduced to a mass of red dust and flakes. I needed to think of metals as stable, like gold—able to stave off the losses and ravages of time.

I WOULD sometimes beg my mother to bring out her engagement ring and show me the diamond in it. It flashed like nothing I had ever seen, almost as if it gave out more light than it took in. My mother showed me how easily it scratched glass, and then she told me to put it to my lips. It was strangely, startlingly cold—metals felt cool to the touch, but the diamond was icy. That was because it conducted heat





ROBERT PARK HARRISON, "EDISON'S LIGHT" (1998)/BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY

so well, she said—better than any metal—so it drew the body heat away from one's lips when they touched it. This was a feeling I was never to forget. Another time, she showed me how if one touched a diamond to a cube of ice it would draw heat from one's hand into the ice and cut straight through it as if it were butter.

My mother told me that diamond was a special form of carbon, like the coal we used in every room in winter. I was puzzled by this—how could black, flaky, opaque coal be the same as the hard, transparent gemstone in her ring?

I would gaze into the heart of the coal fire, watching it go from a dim red glow to orange, to yellow, and blow on it with the bellows until it glowed almost white-hot. If it got hot enough, I wondered, would it blaze blue, be blue-hot?

I loved light, especially the lighting of the Sabbath candles on Friday nights, when my mother would murmur a prayer as she lit them. I was not allowed to touch them once they were lit—they were sacred, I was told, their flames were holy, not to be fiddled with. The little cone of blue flame at the candle's center—why was it blue?

Did the sun and stars burn in the same way? Why did they never go out?

MY mother showed me other wonders—she had a necklace of polished yellow pieces of amber, and she showed me how, when she rubbed them, tiny pieces of paper would fly up and stick to them. Or she would put the electrified amber against my ear, and I would hear and feel a tiny snap, a spark.

My older brothers Marcus and David were fond of magnets, and enjoyed demonstrating them to me, drawing a magnet beneath a piece of paper on which were strewn powdery iron filings. I never tired of the remarkable patterns which rayed out from the poles of the magnet. "Those are lines of force," my brother Marcus explained to me—but I was none the wiser.

Then there was the crystal radio I played with in bed, jiggling the wire on the crystal until I got a station loud and clear. And the luminous clocks—the house was full of them, because my Uncle Abe had been a pioneer in the development of luminous paints. These, too, like my crystal radio, I would take under the bedclothes at night, into my private, secret vault, and they would

light up my cavern of sheets with an eerie, greenish light.

All these things—the rubbed amber, the magnets, the crystal radio, the clock dials with their tireless coruscations—gave me a sense of invisible rays and forces, a sense that beneath the familiar world of colors and appearances lay a dark, hidden world of mysterious laws and phenomena.

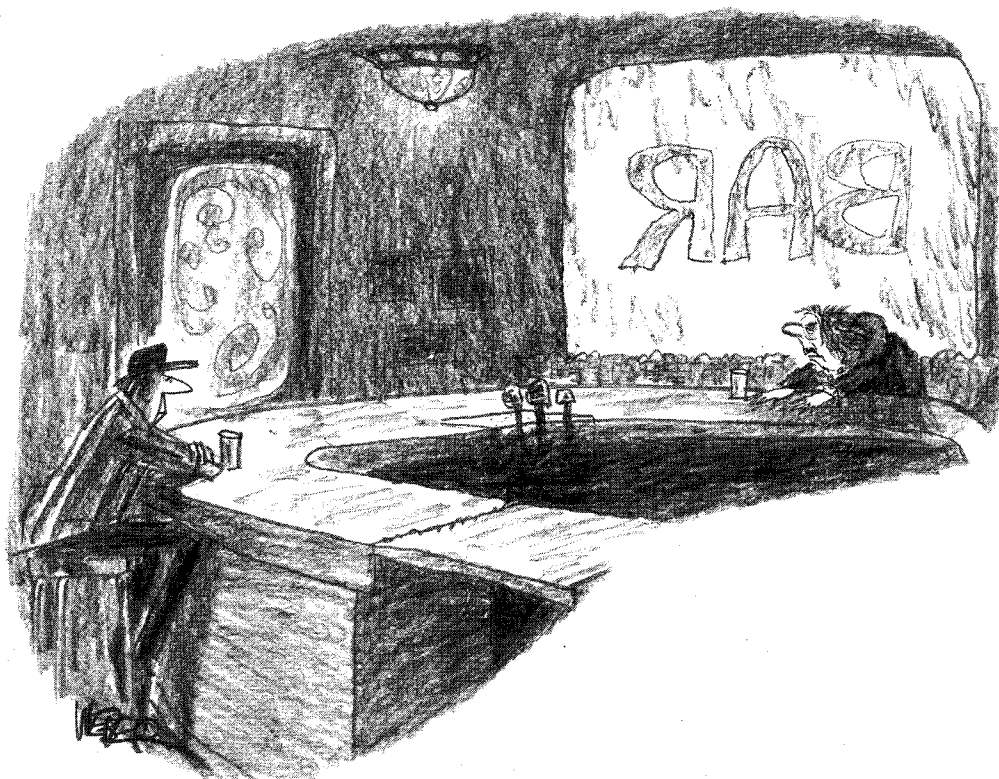
I GREW up in London, before the war. My father and mother were both physicians. My father had his surgery in the house, with all sorts of medicines, lotions, and elixirs in the dispensary—it looked like an old-fashioned chemist's shop in miniature—and a small lab with a spirit lamp, test tubes, and reagents for testing patients' urine, like the bright-blue Fehling's solution, which turned yellow when there was sugar in the urine. There were potions and cordials in cherry red and golden yellow, and colorful liniments like gentian violet and malachite green.

I badgered my parents constantly with questions. Where did color come from? Why did the platinum loop cause the gas to catch fire? What happened to the sugar when one stirred it into the tea? Where did it go? Why did water bubble when it boiled? (I liked to watch water set to boil on the stove, to see it quivering with heat before it burst into bubbles.)

Whenever we had "a fuse," my father would climb up to the porcelain fuse box high on the kitchen wall, identify the fused fuse, now reduced to a melted blob, and replace it with a new one of an odd, soft wire. I had not known that a metal could melt, nor did I know why it had melted. Could a fuse really be made from the same material as a lawn roller or a tin can?

What was electricity, and how did it flow? Was it a sort of fluid like heat, which could also be conducted? Why did it flow through the metal but not the porcelain? This, too, called for explanation.

My questions were endless, and touched on everything, though they tended to circle around, return to, my obsession, the met-



"I was once a very beautiful woman, but forty years of reading the 'Times' has taken its toll."

als. Why were they shiny? Why smooth? Why cool? Why hard? Why heavy? Why did they bend, not break? Why did they ring? My mother tried to explain, but eventually, when I exhausted her patience, she would say, "That's all I can tell you—you'll have to quiz Uncle Dave to learn more."

WE had called him "Uncle Tungsten" for as long as I could remember, because he manufactured light bulbs with filaments of fine tungsten wire. (His firm was called Tungstalite.) I often visited him in his old factory in Farringdon and watched him at work, in a wing collar, with his shirtsleeves rolled up. The heavy dark tungsten powder would be pressed, hammered, sintered at red heat, then drawn into finer and finer wire for the filaments. Uncle's hands were seamed with the black powder, beyond the power of any washing to get out. After thirty years of his working with tungsten, I imagined, the heavy element was in his lungs and bones, in every vessel and viscus, every tissue of his body. I thought of this as a wonder, not a curse—his body invigorated and fortified by the mighty element, given a strength and enduringness almost more than human.

Whenever I visited the factory, he would take me around the machines, or have his foreman do so. (The foreman was a short, muscular man, a Popeye with enormous forearms, a palpable testament to the benefits of working with tungsten.) I never tired of the ingenious machines, always beautifully clean and sleek and oiled, or the furnace where the black powder was compacted from a powdery incoherence into dense, hard bars with a gray sheen.

During my visits to the factory, and sometimes at home, Uncle Dave would teach me about metals, with little experiments. I knew that mercury, that strange liquid metal, was incredibly heavy and dense. Even lead floated on it, as my uncle showed me with a lead bullet and a bowl of quicksilver. But then he pulled out a small gray bar from his pocket, and, to my amazement, it sank immediately to the bottom. This, he said, was his metal: tungsten.

Uncle loved the density of the tungsten he made, and its refractoriness, its great chemical stability. He loved to handle it—the wire, the powder, but the



"You people make me sick. Nonetheless, here's a little toe-tapper."

massy little bars and ingots most of all. He caressed them, balanced them (tenderly, it seemed to me) in his hands. "Feel it, Oliver!" he would say, thrusting a bar at me. "Nothing in the world feels like sintered tungsten." He would tap the little bars and they would emit a deep clink. "The sound of tungsten," Uncle Dave would say. "Nothing like it." I did not know whether this was true, but I never questioned it.

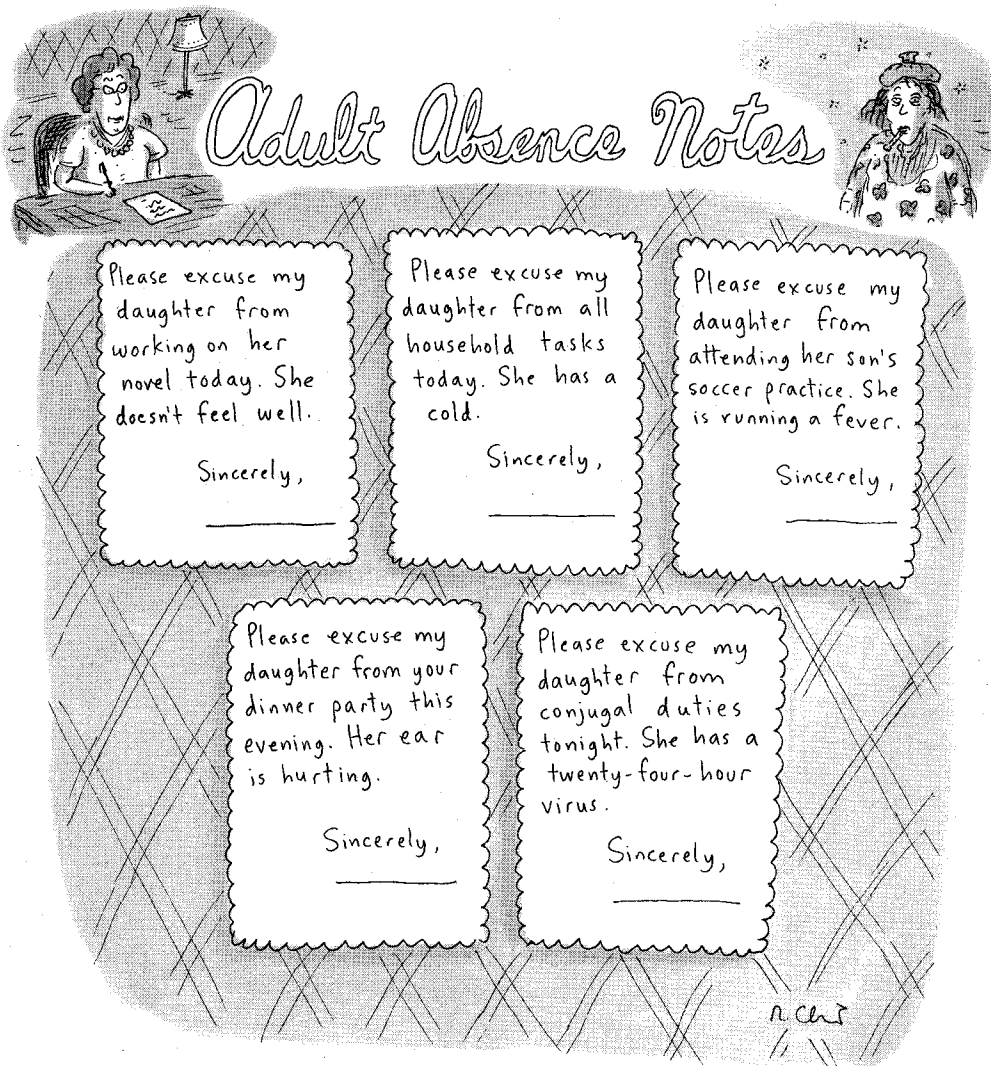
II—EXILE

IN September, 1939, war broke out. It was expected that London would be heavily bombed, and parents were pressured by the government to evacuate their children to safety in the countryside. My brother Michael, five years older than I, had been going to a day school near our house in West Hampstead, and when it was closed at the outbreak of the war one of the assistant masters there decided to reconstitute the school, in a little village I will call Greystone. My parents (I was to realize many years later) were greatly worried about the consequences of separating a little boy—I was just six—from his family and sending him to a makeshift boarding school in the Midlands, but they felt they had no choice, and took some comfort that at least Michael and I would be together.

This, perhaps, might have worked out well—evacuation did work out rea-

sonably well for thousands of others. But the school, as reconstituted, was a travesty of the original. Food was rationed and scarce, and our food parcels from home were looted by the matron. Our basic diet was swedes and mangelwurzel—giant turnips and huge, coarse beetroots grown basically for cattle. There was a steam-pudding whose revolting, suffocating smell comes back to me (as I write, almost sixty years later) and sets me retching and gagging once again. The horribleness of the school was made worse for most of us by the sense that we had been abandoned by our families, left to rot in this awful place as an inexplicable punishment for something we had done.

The headmaster seemed to have become unhinged by his own power. He had been decent enough, even well liked, as a teacher in London, Michael said, but at Greystone, where he took over, he had quickly become a monster. He was vicious and sadistic, and beat many of us almost daily, with relish. "Willfulness" was severely punished. I sometimes wondered if I was his "darling," the one selected for a maximum of punishment, but in fact many of us were so beaten we could hardly sit down for days on end. Once, when he had broken a cane on my eight-year-old bottom, he roared "Damn you, Sacks! Look what you have made me do!" and added the cost of the cane to my bill. Bullying and cruelty, mean-



electric torches dimmed with red crêpe paper. We had no idea if our houses would still be standing in the morning.

On another occasion, an incendiary bomb, a thermite bomb, fell behind our house, and burned with a terrible, white-hot heat. My father had a stirrup pump, and my brothers carried pails of water to him, but water seemed useless against this infernal fire—indeed, made it burn even more furiously. There was a vicious hissing and sputtering when the water hit the metal, and meanwhile the bomb was melting its casing, and throwing white-hot blobs and jets of molten metal in all directions. The lawn was as scarred and charred as a volcanic landscape the next morning, but littered, to my delight, with beautiful gleaming shrapnel. I had never seen melted iron or magnesium before.

THERE had been some religious feeling, of a childish sort, in the years before the war. When my mother lit the Sabbath candles, I would feel, almost

while, were rife among the boys, and great ingenuity was exercised in finding out the weak points of the smaller children and tormenting them beyond bearable limits. I felt trapped at Grey-stone, without hope, without recourse, forever—and many of us, I suspect, were severely disturbed by being there.

And yet the old vicarage, with its spacious garden, where the school was housed, the old church next door to it, the village itself, and the countryside surrounding it were charming, even idyllic. The villagers were kind to these obviously uprooted and unhappy young boys from London. It was here in the village that I learned to ride horses, with a strapping young woman; she sometimes hugged me when I looked miserable. (My brother had read me parts of "Gulliver's Travels," and I sometimes thought of her as Glumdalclitch, Gulliver's giant nurse.) There was an old lady to whom I went for piano

lessons, and she would make tea for me. And there was the village shop, where I would go to buy gob-stoppers and, occasionally, a slice of Spam. There were even times in school which I enjoyed: making model planes of balsa wood, and a tree house with a friend, a red-haired boy of my own age.

DURING the four years I was at Grey-stone, my parents visited us at the school, but very rarely. There was one return visit to London, in December of 1940—a frightening one, because the Blitz was still at its height. One night, a thousand-pound bomb fell on the house next to ours. Fortunately, it failed to explode. All of us, the entire street, it seemed, crept away that night (my family to a cousin's house)—many of us in our pajamas—walking as softly as we could. (Might vibration set the thing off?) The streets were pitch dark, for the blackout was in force, and we all carried

physically, the Sabbath coming in, being welcomed, descending like a soft mantle over the earth. I imagined, too, that this occurred all over the universe—the Sabbath descending on far-off star systems and galaxies, enfolding them all in the peace of God.

But when I was suddenly abandoned by my parents (as I saw it) my trust in them, my love for them, was rudely shaken, and with this my belief in God, too. What evidence was there, I kept asking myself, for God's existence? I determined on an experiment to resolve the matter decisively: I planted two rows of radishes side by side in the vegetable garden, and asked God to bless one or curse one, whichever He wished, so that I might see a clear difference between them. The two rows of radishes came up identical, and this was proof for me that no God existed. But I longed now even more for something to believe in.

As the beatings, the starvings, the tormentings continued, those of us who remained at school (many had been taken away by their parents, but Michael and I never complained) were driven to more and more extreme psychological measures—dehumanizing, derealizing, our chief tormentor. Sometimes, while being beaten, I would see him reduced to a gesticulating skeleton. (I had seen radiographs at home—bones in a tenuous envelope of flesh.) At other times, I would see him as not a being at all but a temporary vertical collection of atoms. I would say to myself, “He’s only atoms”—and, more and more, I craved a world that was “only atoms.” The violence exuded by the headmaster seemed at times to contaminate the whole of living nature, so that I saw violence as the very principle of life.

What could I do, in these circumstances, other than seek a private place, a refuge where I might be alone, absorb myself without interference from others, and find some sense of stability and warmth? My situation was perhaps similar to that which Freeman Dyson describes in his autobiographical essay “To Teach or Not to Teach”:

I belonged to a small minority of boys who were lacking in physical strength and athletic prowess . . . and squeezed between the twin oppressions of whip and sandpaper [a vicious headmaster and bullying boys]. . . . We found our refuge in a territory that was equally inaccessible to our Latin-obsessed headmaster and our football-obsessed schoolmates. We found our refuge in science. . . . We learned . . . that science is a territory of freedom and friendship in the midst of tyranny and hatred.

FOR me, the refuge I found at first was in numbers. My father was a whiz at mental arithmetic, and I, too, even at the age of six, was quick with figures—and, more, in love with them. I liked numbers because they were solid, invariant; they stood unmoved in a chaotic world. There was in numbers and their relation something absolute, certain, not to be questioned, beyond doubt. (Years later, when I read “1984,” the climactic horror for me, the ultimate sign of Winston’s disintegration and surrender, was his being forced, under torture, to deny that two and two is four. Even more terrible was the fact that eventually he began to doubt this in his own mind—that, finally, numbers failed him, too.)

I particularly loved prime numbers, the fact that they were indivisible, could not be broken down, were inalienably themselves. (I had no such confidence in myself, for I felt I was being divided, alienated, broken down more and more every week.) Why did primes come when they did? Was there any pattern, any logic to their distribution? Was there any limit to them, or did they go on forever? I spent innumerable hours factoring, searching for primes, memorizing them. They afforded me many hours of absorbed, solitary play, in which I needed no one else.

I made a grid, ten by ten, of the first hundred numbers, with the primes blacked in, but I could see no pattern, no logic to their distribution. I made larger tables, increased my grids to twenty squared, thirty squared, but still could discern no obvious pattern.

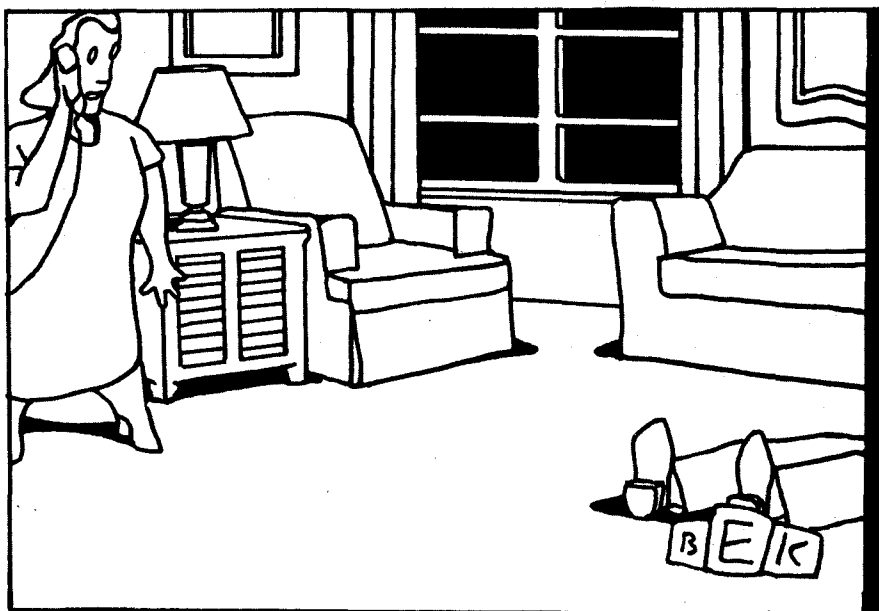
The only real holidays I had during the war were visits to a favorite aunt in Cheshire, in the midst of Delamere Forest, where she had founded the Jewish Fresh Air School for “delicate children.” All the children, indeed, had little gardens of their own, squares of earth a couple of yards wide, bordered by stones. I wished desperately that I could go there, rather than Greystone—but this was a wish I never expressed (though I wondered if my clear-sighted and loving aunt did not divine it).

On my visits, Auntie Len always delighted me by showing me all sorts of botanical and mathematical plea-

tures. She showed me the spiral patterns on the faces of sunflowers in the garden, and suggested I count the florets in these. As I did so, she pointed out that they were arranged according to a series—1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, etc.—each number being the sum of the two that preceded it. And if one divided each number by the number that followed it ($1/2$, $2/3$, $3/5$, $5/8$, etc.), one approached the number 0.618. This series, she said, was called a Fibonacci series, after an Italian mathematician who had lived centuries before. The ratio of 0.618, she added, was known as the Divine Proportion or Golden Section, an ideal geometrical proportion found in many plants and shells, and often used by architects.

She would take me for long, botanizing walks in the forest, where she had me look at fallen pinecones, to see that they, too, had spirals based on the Golden Section. She showed me horsetails growing near a stream, had me feel their stiff, jointed stems, and suggested that I measure these when I got back to school, and plot the lengths of the successive segments as a graph. When I did so, and saw that the curve flattened out, she explained that the increments were “exponential,” and that this was the way growth usually occurred. These ratios, these geometric proportions, she told me, were to be found all over nature—numbers were the way the world is put together. Numbers, my aunt said, are the way God thinks.

The association of plants, of gar-



“It’s so silly. Now I can’t even remember why I killed him.”

dens, with numbers assumed a curiously intense, symbolic form for me. I started to think in terms of a kingdom or a realm of numbers, with its own geography, languages, and laws; but, even more, of a garden of numbers, a magical, secret, wonderful garden in which I could wander and play to my heart's content. It was a garden hidden from, inaccessible to, the bullies and the headmaster; and a garden, too, where I somehow felt welcomed and befriended. Among my friends in this garden were not only primes and Fibonacci sunflowers but perfect numbers (such as 6 or 28, the sum of their factors excluding themselves); Pythagorean numbers, whose square was the sum of two other squares (such as 3, 4, 5 or 5, 12, 13); and "amicable numbers"—pairs of numbers (such as 220 and 284) in which the factors of each added up to the other. And my aunt had shown me that my garden of numbers was doubly magical—not just delightful and friendly, always there, but part of the plan on which the whole universe was built.

III—UNCLE TUNGSTEN

I RETURNED to London in the summer of 1943, after four years of exile, a ten-year-old boy, withdrawn and disturbed in some ways but with a passion for metals, for plants, and for numbers.

I delighted in being able to visit Uncle Tungsten again, and I think he also delighted in having his young protégé back, for he would spend hours with me in his factory and his lab, answering questions as fast as I could ask them.

He had several glass-fronted cabinets in his office, one of which contained a series of electric light bulbs: there were several Edison bulbs from the early eighteen-eighties, with filaments of carbonized thread; a bulb from 1897, with a filament of osmium; and several bulbs from a few years later, with spidery filaments of tantalum tracing a zigzag course inside them.

Then there were the more recent bulbs—these were Uncle Dave's special pride and interest, for some he had pioneered himself—with tungsten filaments of all shapes and sizes. There was even one labelled "Bulb of the Future?" It had no filament, but the word "Rhenium" was inscribed on a card beside it.

I had heard of platinum, but the

other metals—osmium, tantalum, rhenium—were new to me. Uncle kept samples of them all, and some of their ores, in a cabinet next to the bulbs. As he handled them, he would expatiate on their unique, sovereign properties and qualities, how they had been discovered, how they were refined, and why they were so suitable for making filaments.

He would bring out a pitted gray nugget. "Dense, eh?" he would say, tossing it to me. "That's a platinum nugget. This is how it is found, as nuggets of pure metal. Most metals are found as compounds with other things, in ores. There are very few other metals which occur native like platinum—just gold, silver, and copper, and one or two others." These other native metals had been known, he said, for thousands of years, but platinum had been "discovered" only two hundred years ago, for though it had been prized by the Incas for centuries, it was unknown to the rest of the world. When the explorers brought it back, in the eighteenth century, the new metal enchanted all of Europe—it was denser, more ponderous than gold, and, like gold, it was "noble" and never tarnished. It had a lustre exceeding that of silver. (Its Spanish name, *platina*, meant "little silver.")

Native platinum was often found with two other metals, iridium and osmium, which were even denser, harder, more refractory. Here Uncle pulled out samples for me to handle, mere flakes, no larger than lentils, but astoundingly heavy. These were "osmiridium," a natural alloy of osmium and iridium, the two densest substances in the world. There was something about heaviness, density—I could not say why—which gave me a thrill, and an immense sense of security and comfort. Osmium, moreover, had the highest melting point of all the platinum metals, so it was used at one time, Uncle said, to replace the platinum filaments in light bulbs.

The great virtue of the platinum metals was that they were as noble and workable as gold but had much higher melting points. Crucibles made of platinum could withstand the hottest temperatures; beakers and spatulas of it could withstand the most corrosive acids. Uncle Dave often used platinumware in his own lab, sometimes alloyed with other platinum metals to give it greater hardness, and a still

higher melting point. He pulled out a small crucible from the cabinet, beautifully smooth and shiny. It looked new. "This was made around 1840," he said. "A century of use, and almost no wear."

UNCLE DAVE saw the whole earth, I think, as a gigantic natural laboratory, where heat and pressure caused not only vast geologic movements but innumerable chemical miracles. "Look at these diamonds," he would say. "They were formed thousands of millions of years ago, deep in the earth, under unimaginable pressures."

He liked to pull out the native metals from his cabinet—twists and spangles of rosy copper, wiry silver, latticed gold. "Think how it must have been," he said, "seeing metal for the first time—sudden glints of reflected sunlight, sudden shinings in a rock or at the bottom of a stream!"

He would conjure up the first smelting of metal, how cavemen might have used rocks containing a copper mineral—green malachite, perhaps—to surround a cooking fire and suddenly realized as the wood turned to charcoal that the green rock was bleeding, turning into a red liquid: molten copper.

It took a much hotter fire, a white-hot fire, to obtain tungsten. Uncle Dave handed me a little ingot. "Tungsten," he said. "No one realized at first how perfect a metal tungsten was. It has the highest melting point of any metal, it is tougher than steel, and it keeps its strength at high temperatures—an ideal metal!"

Uncle had a variety of tungsten bars in his office—some he used as paperweights, but others had no discernible function whatever, except to give pleasure to their owner and maker. And, indeed, by comparison steel bars, and even lead, felt light and somehow porous, tenuous. "These lumps of tungsten have an extraordinary concentration of mass," he would say. "They would be deadly as weapons—far deadlier than lead."

But sooner or later Uncle's soliloquies and demonstrations before the cabinet all returned to tungsten's mineral ores. One of these, scheelite, was named after the great Swedish chemist Carl Wilhelm Scheele, who was the first to show that it contained a new element. The ore was so dense that miners



called it "heavy stone," or "*tung-sten*," the name subsequently given to the element itself. Scheelite was found in beautiful orange crystals that fluoresced bright blue in ultraviolet light. Uncle Dave kept specimens of scheelite and other fluorescent minerals in a special cabinet in his office. The dim light of Farringdon Road on a November evening, it seemed to me, would be transformed when he turned on his Wood's lamp, and the luminous chunks in the cabinet suddenly glowed orange, turquoise, crimson, green.

Though scheelite was the largest source of tungsten metal, the metal had first been obtained from a different mineral, called wolframite. Indeed, tungsten was sometimes called wolfram, and still retained the chemical symbol of W. This thrilled me, because my own middle name was Wolf. Heavy seams of the tungsten ores were often found along with tin ore, and the tungsten made it more difficult to isolate the tin. This was why, my uncle continued, they had originally called the metal wolfram—for, like a hungry animal, it "stole" the tin. I liked the name wolfram, its sharp, animal quality, its evocation of a ravaging, mystical wolf—and thought of it as a tie between Uncle Tungsten, Uncle Wolfram, and myself, O. Wolf Sacks.

NAMES fascinated me—their sounds, their associations, the sense they gave of people and places. The names of the elements were filled with such evocations, but there were only a few dozen of these, whereas the number of minerals ran into the hundreds or thousands. These were all beautifully laid out, with their names and formulas, in the cabinets of the Geology Museum, in South Kensington, where, later, I would go whenever I could.

The older names gave one a sense of antiquity and alchemy: corundum and galena, orpiment and realgar. (Orpiment and realgar, two arsenic sulfides, went euphoniously together, and made me think of an operatic couple, like Tristan and Isolde.) There was pyrites, fool's gold, in brassy, metallic cubes, and chalcedony and ruby and sapphire and spinel. Zircon sounded Oriental; calomel, Greek—its honeylike sweetness, its "mel," belied by its poisonness. There was the medieval-sounding sal

ammoniac. There was cinnabar, the heavy red sulfide of mercury, and massicot and minium, the twin oxides of lead.

Then there were minerals named after people. One of the most common minerals, much of the redness of the world, was the hydrated iron oxide called goethite. (Was this named in honor of Goethe, or did he discover it? I had read that he had a passion for mineralogy and chemistry.) Many minerals were named after chemists—gallussite, scheelite, berzelianite, bunsenite, liebigite, moissanite, crookesite, and the beautiful, prismatic "ruby-silver," proustite. There was samarskite, named after a mining engineer, Colonel Samarski. There were other names that



INCUNABULAR

Tom Fisher was my Grail King:
he endowed the Gothic library
to which my life had been pointing.
His high sandstone box held the culture
bush folk were scorned for lacking.

On its milk-glass stack levels I still
hear stiletto heels clacking,
glass floors for the light to perfuse,
not for voyeurs: you could only
make out the sex of the shoes.

The lipsticked gargoyle downstairs
kissed much social ascent.
Above, I'd browse beside the point
power made, for the points it didn't.
Reflex, more than intent.

The reading-room beams supported heraldry
and a roof like a steep tent.
Mine was a plan-free mass of querying
of condensed humans off the shelves,
all numbered, the tribal, the elderly.

Knowledge was the gait of compressed selves
and poetry seemed windows of italic
inset in grievous prose
which served it and mastered it:
few grapes for many rows.

were evocative in a more topical way: stolzite, a lead tungstate, and scholzite, too. Who were Stolz and Scholz? Their names seemed very Prussian to me, and this, just after the war, evoked an anti-German feeling. I imagined Stolz and Scholz as Nazi officers with barking voices, swordsticks, and monocles.

Other names appealed to me mostly for their sound, and for the images they conjured up. I loved classical words and their depiction of simple properties—the crystal forms, colors, shapes, and optics of minerals—like diaspore and anastase and microlite and polycrase. A great favorite was cryolite—ice stone, from Greenland, so low in refractive index that it was transparent, almost ghostly, and, like ice, became invisible in water.

ON one visit, Uncle Dave showed me a large bar of aluminum. After the dense platinum metals, I was amazed at how light it was, scarcely

Students murmured airily of the phallic
they were going to be marked by,
but the shelvers' book trolleys were parked by
closed gaping tomes and stood them dryly back,
vogue, value, theory.

The stacks clanged down metal stairs
to floors below reality,
to books in dragon-buckram, books like dreams,
antiphonaries and grimoires,
philologies with pages still uncut:

my blade made a sound like a *rut*.
I never used the catalogue,
it held no serendipities.
The lateral book's the tip: it is
the seminal one near the one set.

You must range real shelves to find it.
Strict exams could have excluded me;
Soon they did weed out my sort.
Critique closed over poetry,
the hip proved very straight.

What our donjon of kisses and cribs held
they say now will go on line.
This does not light my taper.
Others may have my joys at home? Fine.
But I surfed the true paper.

—LES MURRAY

heavier than a piece of wood. "I'll show you something interesting," he said. He took a smaller lump of aluminum, with a smooth, shiny surface, and smeared it with mercury. All of a sudden—it was like some terrible disease—the surface broke down, and a white substance like a fungus rapidly grew out of it, until it was a quarter of an inch high, then half an inch high, and it kept growing and growing until the small piece of aluminum was completely eaten up. "You've seen iron rust, oxidizing, combining with the oxygen in the air," Uncle said. "But here, with the aluminium, it's a million times faster. That big bar is still quite shiny, because it's covered by a fine layer of oxide, and that protects it from further change. But rubbing it with mercury destroys the surface layer, so then the aluminium has no protection, and it combines with the oxygen in seconds."

I found this magical, astounding, but also a little frightening—to see a bright

and shiny metal reduced so quickly to a crumbling mass of oxide. It made me think of a curse or a spell, the sort of disintegration I sometimes saw in my dreams. It made me think of mercury as evil, as a destroyer of metals. Would it do this to every sort of metal?

"Don't worry," Uncle answered. "The metals we use here, they're perfectly safe. If I put this little bar of tungsten in the mercury, it would not be affected at all. If I put it away for a million years, it would be just as bright and shiny as it is now." In a precarious world, tungsten, at least, was stable.

As the youngest of almost the youngest (I was the last of four, and my mother the sixteenth of eighteen), I was born nearly a hundred years after my maternal grandfather, and never knew him. He was born Mordechai Fredkin, in 1837, in a small village in Russia. As a youth, he managed to avoid being impressed into the Cossack Army, and

fled Russia, using the passport of a dead man named Landau. He was sixteen. As Marcus Landau, he made his way to Paris, and then Frankfurt, where he married. (His wife was sixteen, too.) Two years later, in 1855, now with the first of their children, they moved to England.

My mother's father was, by all accounts, a man drawn equally to the spiritual and the physical. He was by profession a boot and shoe manufacturer, a *shochet* (a kosher slaughterer), and later a grocer—but he was also a Hebrew scholar, a mystic, an amateur mathematician, and an inventor. He had a wide-ranging mind: he published a newspaper, the *Jewish Standard*, in his basement, from 1888 to 1891; he was interested in the new science of aeronautics, and corresponded with the Wright brothers, who paid him a visit when they came to London in the early nineteen-hundreds. (Some of my uncles could still remember this.) He had a passion, my aunts and uncles told me, for intricate arithmetical calculations, which he would do in his head, while lying in the bath. But he was drawn, above all, to the invention of lamps—safety lamps for mines, carriage lamps, street lamps—and he patented many of these in the eighteen-seventies. When I was very small, my mother would take me to the Science Museum, in South Kensington, up to the top floor, where there was a simulacrum of a coal mine, its dim, low passages lit by fitful beams. There she would show me the Landau safety lamp on display, right next to the more famous Humphry Davy lamp.

A polymath and an autodidact himself, Grandfather was passionately keen on education—and, most especially, a scientific education—for all his children, for his nine daughters no less than for his nine sons. Whether it was this or the sharing of his own passionate enthusiasms, seven of his sons were eventually drawn to mathematics and the physical sciences—including the two I was closest to, Uncle Dave and Uncle Abe.

IV—STINKS AND BANGS

MY parents and my brothers had introduced me, even before the war, to some kitchen chemistry: pouring vinegar on a piece of chalk in a tumbler and watching it fizz; then pouring

the heavy gas this produced, like an invisible cataract, over a candle flame, putting it out straightaway. Or taking red cabbage, pickled with vinegar, and adding household ammonia to neutralize it. This would lead to an amazing transformation, the juice going through all sorts of colors, from red to various shades of purple, to turquoise and blue, and finally to green. I enjoyed these experiments, I wondered what was going on, but I did not feel a real chemical passion—a desire to compound, to isolate, to decompose, to see substances changing, familiar ones disappearing and new ones appearing in their stead—until I returned from Greystone, remet Uncle Dave, and saw his lab and his passion for experiments of all kinds.

Now, after hearing him talk about chemistry, and starting to read about

chemistry and chemists myself, I longed to have a lab of my own.

As a start, I wanted to lay hands on cobaltite and niccolite, and compounds or minerals of manganese and molybdenum, of uranium and chromium—all those wonderful elements that were discovered in the eighteenth century. I wanted to pulverize them, treat them with acid, roast them, reduce them—whatever was necessary—so I could extract their metals myself. I knew, from looking through a chemical catalogue at the factory, that one could buy these metals already purified, but it would be far more fun, far more exciting, I reckoned, if I was able to make them myself. This way, I would enter chemistry, start to discover it for myself, in much the same way its first practitioners did—I would live the history of chemistry in myself.

It was through reading Mary Elvira Weeks's "Discovery of the Elements"—a book published just before the war—that I got a vivid idea of the lives of many chemists, the great variety, and sometimes vagaries, of character they showed; and the relation (sometimes) between their characters and their work. Here I found quotations from the early chemists' letters, which portrayed their excitements (and despairs) as they fumbled and groped their way to their discoveries, losing the track now and again, getting caught in blind alleys, though ultimately reaching the goal they sought.

If Humphry Davy was the first chemist I had ever heard of, he was also the one I most warmed to. I loved reading of his experiments with explosives and electric fish; his discovery of incandescent metal filaments and electric arcs; of catalysts (it was only now that I realized why we had a platinum loop above the gas stove); of the physiological effects of nitrous oxide, laughing gas; and, above all, of his using the just invented electric battery to isolate the alkali and alkaline-earth metals in a single miraculous year. He appealed to me especially because he was boyish and impulsive, the way he danced with joy all around his lab when he first isolated potassium, in 1807, and saw the shining metallic globules burst and take fire. Davy moved me to emulation—to sampling the effects of nitrous oxide for myself (my mother kept a cylinder of it in her obstetric bag), and making my own sodium and potassium by electrolysis.

I was awed, too, by the figure of Mendeleev—his passionate search for order among the elements (more than sixty were known by the eighteenth century, a rich chaos), and his final discovery of such an order (supposedly in a dream) in 1869. When I first saw the Periodic Table, it hit me with the force of revelation—it embodied, I was convinced, eternal truths, the eternal and necessary order of the elements. I thought of Mendeleev as a sort of Moses, bearing the tablets of the God-given Periodic Law.

And then, in a different mode, there was Marie Curie, who had spent four backbreaking years in a shed extracting a pinch of "her" element, radium, from four stubborn tons of pitchblende. Ra-



"Only time will tell whether this merger makes sense or not."

dium, my mother would say, was a magical element, with unique powers to harm and cure. She herself had worked with radium therapy at the Marie Curie Hospital, in London, and had met Marie Curie on one occasion. (I was intrigued when she told me of the radium “bomb” at the hospital, and the fine gold needles full of radon which were inserted into tumors.) Eve Curie’s biography of her mother—which my mother gave me when I was ten—was the first portrait of a scientist I read, and Marie Curie was added to my pantheon of heroes. (Fifty-five years later, in 1998, at a meeting in New York to celebrate the centenary of the Curies’ discovery of polonium and radium, I met Eve Curie, now in her nineties, and asked her to sign the book.)

It was through reading these accounts that I first realized one could have heroes in real life. There seemed to me an integrity, an essential goodness, about a life dedicated to science. I had never given much thought to what I might be when I was “grown up”—growing up was hardly imaginable—but now I knew: I wanted to be a chemist. A sort of eighteenth-century chemist coming fresh to the field, looking at the whole, undiscovered world of natural substances and minerals, analyzing them, plumbing their secrets, finding the wonder of new and unknown metals.

AND so I set up a little lab of my own at home. There was an unused back room I took over, originally a laundry room, which had running water and a sink and drain and various cupboards and shelves. Conveniently, this room led out to the garden—so that if I concocted something that caught fire, or boiled over, or emitted noxious fumes, I could rush outside with it and fling it on the lawn. The lawn soon developed charred and discolored patches, but this, my parents felt, was a small price to pay for my safety—their own, too, perhaps. But seeing occasional flaming globules rushing through the air, and the general turbulence and abandon with



“If we’re being honest, it was your decision to follow my recommendations that cost you money.”

which I did things, they were alarmed, and urged me to plan experiments and to be prepared to deal with fires and explosions. Eventually, after I had filled the house one day with vile-smelling (and very toxic) hydrogen sulfide, they insisted that I install a small fume cupboard, and a special drain for corrosive liquids—and that with dangerous experiments I wear gloves and goggles.

Uncle Dave advised me closely on the choice of apparatus—test tubes, flasks, graduated cylinders, funnels, pipettes and burettes, a Bunsen burner, crucibles, watch glasses, a platinum loop, a desiccator, a blowpipe, a range of spatulas, a balance. He advised me, too, on basic reagents, some of which he gave me from his own lab, along with a supply of stoppered bottles of all sizes—bottles of varied shapes and colors (dark green or brown for light-sensitive chemicals), with perfectly fitting ground-glass stoppers.

Every month or so, I stocked my lab with visits to a chemical-supply shop, Griffin & Tatlock, far out in Finchley. The shop was housed in a large shed set at a distance from its neighbors (who viewed it, I imagined, with a certain trepidation, as a place that might explode or exhale poisonous fumes at any

moment). I would hoard my pocket money for weeks—occasionally one of my uncles, approving my secret passion, would slip me a half crown or so—and then take a succession of trains and buses to the shop. The cheaper chemicals were kept in huge stoppered urns of glass. The rarer, more costly substances were kept in smaller bottles. Hydrofluoric acid—dangerous stuff, used for etching glass—could not be kept in glass, so it was sold in special small bottles made of gutta-percha, a sort of rubbery substance. Beneath the serried urns and bottles on the shelves were great carboys of acid—sulfuric, nitric, aqua regia; globular china bottles of mercury (it was incredibly dense, and seven pounds of it would fit into a bottle the size of a fist); and slabs and ingots of the commoner metals. The shopkeepers soon got to know me—an intense and rather undersized schoolboy, clutching his pocket money, spending hours amid the jars and bottles—and though they would warn me now and then, “Go easy with that one!” they always let me have what I wished.

MY first taste was for the spectacular—the frothings, the incandescences, the stinks and the bangs, which almost define an entry into chem-

istry. One of my guides was J. J. Griffin's "Chemical Recreations," an 1850-ish book I had found in a secondhand bookshop. Griffin started recreational, and gradually got more systematic. I worked my way through "Alteration of Vegetable Colours by Acids and Alkalis," "Experiments with Coloured Liquors and Sympathetic Inks," "Chemical Metamorphoses," and then got on to the serious stuff. There was a special chapter on "Chemistry for Holidays," with the "Volatile Plum-Pudding" ("when the cover is removed . . . it leaves its dish and rises to the ceiling"), "A Fountain of Fire" (using phosphorus—"the operator must take care not to burn himself"), and "Brilliant Deflagration" (here, too, one was warned to "remove your hand instantly"). I was amused by the mention of a special formula (sodium tungstate) to render ladies' dresses and curtains incombustible—were fires that common in Victorian times?—and used it to fireproof a handkerchief for myself.

Chemical exploration, chemical discovery, if full of excitement, was full of surprises and dangers, too. I was struck by the range of accidents that had befallen the pioneers. Few naturalists had been devoured by wild animals or stung to death by noxious plants or insects; few physicists had lost their eyesight looking at the heavens, or broken a leg on an inclined plane; but chemists had lost their eyes, their limbs, and sometimes their lives, usually by causing explosions or producing inadvertent toxins. Davy, for instance, had been nearly asphyxiated by nitric oxide, had poisoned himself with nitrogen peroxide, and had severely inflamed his lungs with hydrofluoric acid, prior to his dangerous experiments with nitrogen trichloride.

Bunsen, investigating cacodyl cyanide, lost his right eye in an explosion, and very nearly lost his life. Several experimenters, trying to make diamond from graphite in intensely heated, high-pressure "bombs," threatened to blow themselves and their fellow-workers to kingdom come.

Mary Elvira Weeks's book on the discovery of the elements devoted an entire section to "The Fluorine Martyrs." All the early experimenters, I read, had "suffered the frightful torture of hydrofluoric-acid poisoning," and at least two of them died in the process.

After reading this, I was too scared to open the hydrofluoric acid I had bought.

ATTRACTED by the sounds and flashes and smells coming from my lab, my two older brothers, Marcus and David, now medical students, sometimes joined me in experiments—the ten-year age difference between us hardly mattered at these times. On one occasion, as I was experimenting with hydrogen and oxygen, there was a loud explosion, and an almost invisible sheet of flame, which blew off Marcus's eyebrows completely. But Marcus took this in good part, and he and David often suggested other experiments.

We mixed potassium perchlorate with sugar, put it on the back step, and banged it with a hammer. This caused a most satisfying explosion.

We made a "volcano" together with ammonium dichromate, setting fire to a pyramid of the orange crystals, which then flamed, furiously, becoming red-hot, throwing off showers of sparks in all directions, and swelling portentously, like a miniature volcano. Finally, when it had died down, there was, in place of the neat pyramid of crystals, a huge, fluffy pile of dark-green chromic oxide.

Another early experiment, suggested by David, was pouring oily, concentrated sulfuric acid on a little sugar, which instantly turned black, heated, steamed, expanded, forming a monstrous pillar of carbon that rose high above the rim of the beaker. "Beware," David said as I gazed at this transformation. "You'll be turned into a pillar of carbon if you get the acid on yourself."

THE first recorded individual who discovered an element, it seems, was Hennig Brandt, of Hamburg, who obtained phosphorus (apparently with some alchemical ambition in mind) from urine in 1669. He adored the strange, luminous element, and called

it "cold fire" (*kaltes Feuer*), or, in a more affectionate mood, "*mein Feuer*." Throughout the eighteenth century it was made from bones.

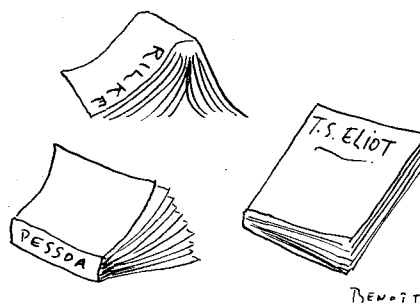
I decided to obtain my phosphorus direct from Griffin & Tatlock. When it came, as a bundle of pale, waxy sticks which one had to keep under water, it had, nonetheless, a persistent garlicky smell—and this, I imagined, was the irremovable residue of its beastly, slaughterhouse origins. It was important to keep it in its brown bottle, because the beautiful, almost colorless translucent sticks became ugly and yellow and opaque with the light—another example of the mysterious power of light.

Phosphorus attracted me strangely, dangerously, because of its luminosity—I would sometimes slip down to my lab at night to gaze at it—the "cold fire" that had so fascinated its discoverer (and had caused him, and others, such terrible burns). A whole series of experiments, of enchantments, spread out from this. As soon as I had my fume cupboard set up, I put a piece of white phosphorus in water and boiled it, dimming the lights so that I could see the steam coming out of the flask, glowing a soft greenish-blue.

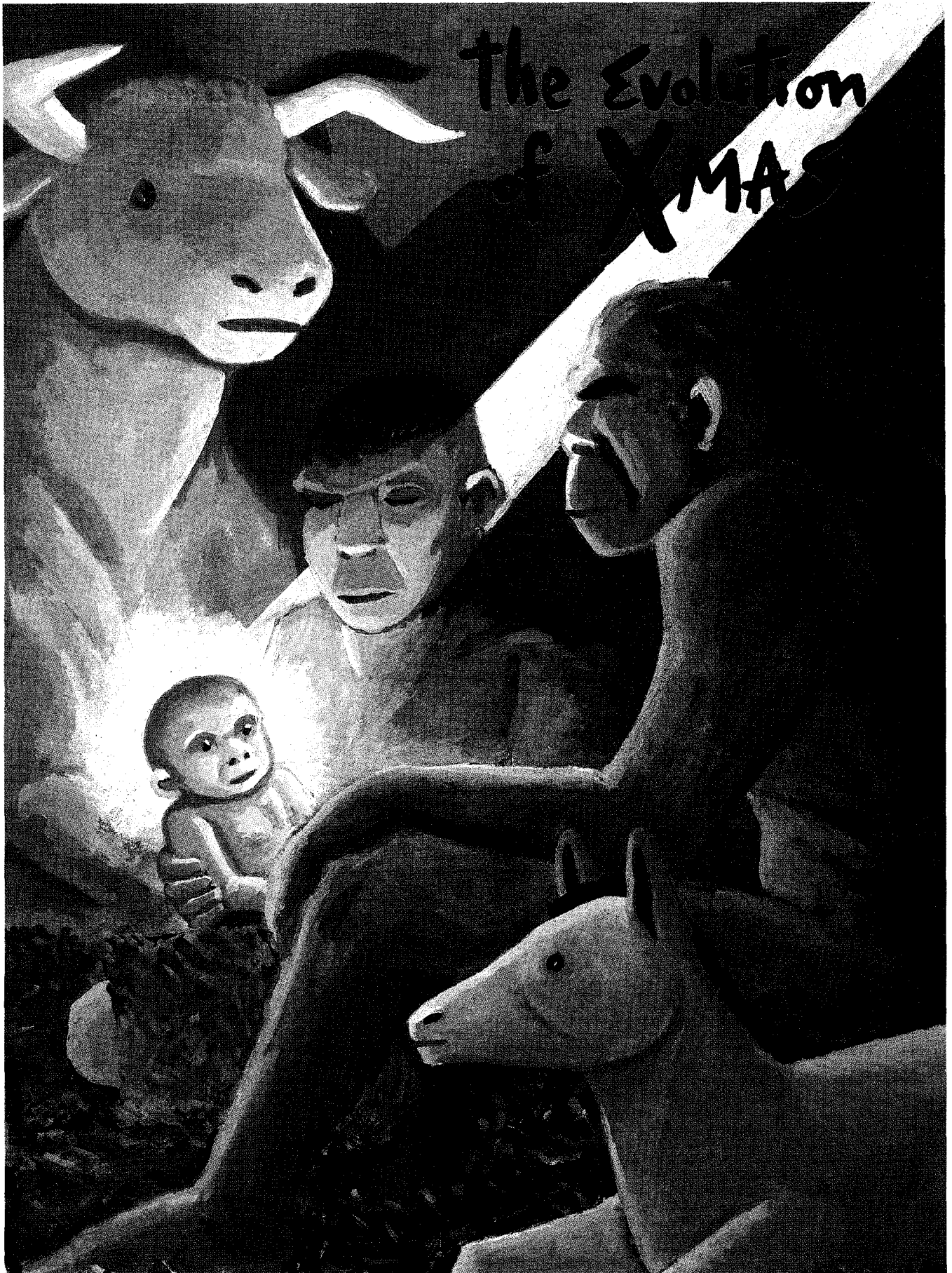
If one ignited phosphorus in a bell jar (using a magnifying glass), the jar would fill with a "snow" of phosphorus pentoxide. If one did this over water, the pentoxide would hiss, like red-hot iron, as it hit the water and dissolved, making phosphoric acid.

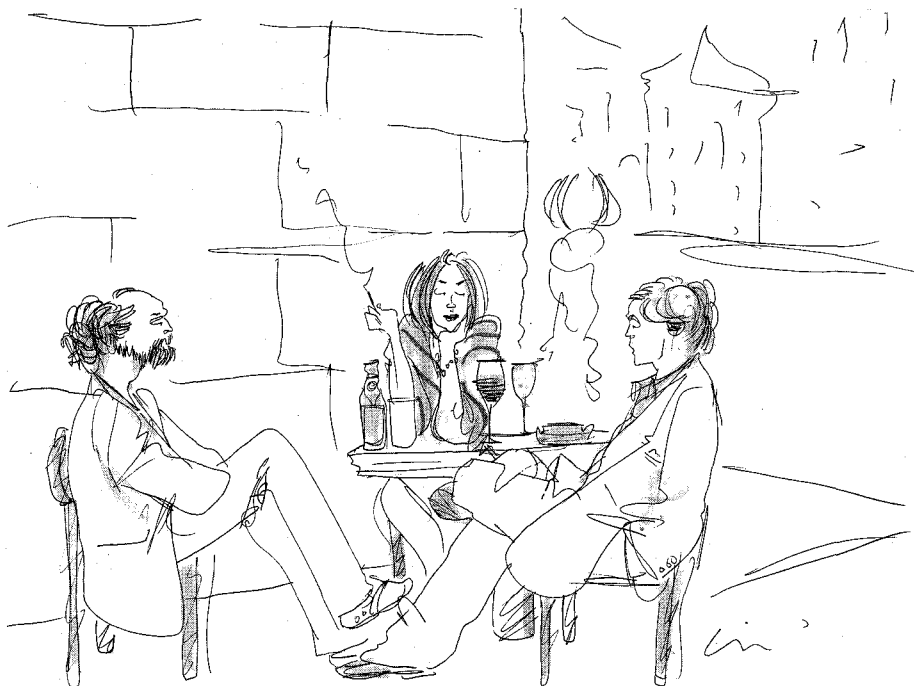
Another, rather beautiful experiment was boiling phosphorus with caustic potash in a retort—I was remarkably nonchalant in boiling up such virulent substances; lucky, too, in that I never really hurt myself—and this produced phosphoretted hydrogen (the old term), or phosphine. As the bubbles of phosphine escaped, they took fire spontaneously, forming beautiful rings of white smoke.

By heating white phosphorus, I could transform it into a much stabler form—red phosphorus, the phosphorus of matchboxes. I had learned as a small child that diamond and graphite were different forms, allotropes, of the same element, and I vividly remembered how my shining tin soldiers had been transformed one winter into a gray dust: "tin pest." Now, in the lab, I could effect some of these changes for myself, turning white phosphorus into red



SKETCHBOOK BY ART SPIEGELMAN





"I got married—I finally realized I'm event-driven."

phosphorus, and then (by condensing its vapor) back again. These transformations made me feel like a magician.

WHILE I darted about these exotic experiments I also went steadily through my small repertoire of chemicals, trying to learn their basic properties and reactions, and the basics of forming and decomposing compounds.

I decomposed water, using a large battery, much as Humphry Davy had done at the start of the nineteenth century; and then I recomposed it, sparking hydrogen and oxygen together. There were many other ways of making hydrogen with acids or alkalis—with zinc and sulfuric acid or aluminum bottle caps and caustic soda.

But it seemed a shame to have the hydrogen just bubble off and go to waste. To stopper my flasks, I got some tight-fitting rubber bungs and corks, some with holes in the middle for glass tubes. One of the things I had learned in Uncle Dave's lab was how to soften glass tubing in a gas flame, and gently bend it to an angle (and, more exciting, to blow glass as well, gently puffing into the molten glass to make thin-walled globes and shapes of all sorts). Now, using glass tubing, I could light the hydrogen as it emerged from the stop-

pered flask. It had a colorless flame—not yellow and smoky, like the flames of gas jets or the kitchen stove. Or I could feed the hydrogen, with a gracefully curved piece of glass tubing, into a soap solution, to make soap bubbles filled with hydrogen; the bubbles, far lighter than air, would rush up to the ceiling and burst.

I made oxygen, too. I wanted to make it by heating mercuric oxide—this was the original way, I read, by which Joseph Priestley had first made it, in 1774—but I was afraid, until the fume cupboard was installed, of toxic mercury fumes. Yet it was easy to prepare by heating an oxygen-rich substance like deep purple-red potassium permanganate. I remember thrusting a glowing wood chip into a test tube full of oxygen, and seeing how it flared up, flamed, with an intense brilliance.

There were some metals that were so reactive they could actually tear the oxygen out of water, leaving the hydrogen to bubble off. Magnesium did this, if the water was hot—this was why one could not put out an incendiary bomb with water. And potassium did so explosively, even in cold water.

Sodium was cheaper, and not quite as violent as potassium, so I decided to look at its action outdoors. I obtained

a good-sized lump of it—about three pounds—and made an excursion to Highgate Pond, in Hampstead Heath, with two of my friends, Eric Korn and Jonathan Miller. When we arrived, we climbed up a little bridge, and then I pulled the sodium out of its oil with tongs, and flung it into the water beneath. It took fire instantly, and sped around and around on the surface like a demented meteor, with a huge sheet of yellow flame above it. My friends still have vivid memories of this. We all exulted—this was chemistry with a vengeance!

V—BRILLIANT LIGHT

THIS first interest in chemistry, this desire to interrogate and explore everything in sight, led to a different feeling after a couple of years—a need to integrate my knowledge, to understand. Not just to throw sodium into water but all the alkali metals, to see how they compared, to plot the trends, physical and chemical, as one went through them all, from lithium to sodium to potassium to rubidium to caesium. Weighing and measuring became crucially important, convincing me of the fixed proportions in which elements combined, drawing me to atomic theory and the concept of atomic weights.

Reading Dalton, who proposed the atomic hypothesis, reading about his atoms (I saw his own wooden models of these in the Science Museum), put me in a sort of rapture, conceiving that the chemical reactions one saw macroscopically, in the lab, with all their puzzling constancies and exactitudes, were the consequence of activities almost infinitely small—single atoms, with distinctive weights and characters, combining with each other one by one—and imagining that if one had a microscope powerful enough, and powers of perception quick enough, this was what one would actually see. Until now, there had been only a vague, mysterious sense of an invisible micro-world; Dalton's atoms gave the imagination something concrete to chew on, made this tangible and real.

It was only when I had the concept of atomic weight firmly in mind, along with the concept of atoms' combining power, or valency, that I could appreciate the startling beauty, the obvious

truth, of the Periodic Table—for me, now, the most beautiful thing in the world. By arranging all the elements in a simple grid of intersecting “Periods” and “Groups,” the Table showed, at a glance, how all of them were related to one another, and how one could predict the existence and properties of as yet undiscovered elements simply by knowing their place in the Table, for when one arranged the elements in order of atomic weight their properties echoed one another periodically. Thus each period started with an alkali metal and ended with an inert gas, and then one shuttled back to the next period, starting with a heavier alkali metal and ending with a heavier inert gas. The periods contained eight elements apiece at first, then expanded to eighteen, then thirty-two—a mysterious but surely fundamental numerical series. I could not help thinking back to the grids, the tables of primes, I used to make, where I sought so desperately for order but found none. The Periodic Table, by contrast, was a Jacob’s ladder, a numinous spiral, going up to, coming down from a Pythagorean heaven.

This almost religious feeling about the Periodic Table afforded me a very deep, cosmic sense of security and stability, a conviction that the physical universe, at least, was lawful, orderly, harmonious. This certainty did much to alleviate the terrifying uncertainties that had so undone me in my years at Greystone.

BESIDES spending time with Uncle Dave and in my lab, I began to spend time with another of my mother’s brothers, Uncle Abe. He was a few years older than Dave, and more disposed to physics than to chemistry: the great discoveries of X-rays, radioactivity, the electron, and quantum theory had all occurred in his formative years.

Though Abe and Dave were alike in some ways (both had the broad Landau face, with wide-set eyes, and the unmistakable, resonant Landau voice—characteristics still marked in the great-great-grandchildren of my grandfather), they were very different in others. Dave was tall and strong, with a military posture (he had served in the Great War, and in the Boer War before that), always carefully dressed. He would

wear a wing collar and highly polished shoes even when he worked at his lab bench. Abe was smaller, somewhat gnarled and bent (in the years that I knew him), brown and grizzled, like an old shikari, with a hoarse voice and chronic cough; he cared little what he wore, and usually had on a sort of rumpled lab smock.

Both Uncle Dave and Uncle Abe were intensely interested in light and lighting, but with Dave it was “hot” light, and with Abe “cold” light. Uncle Dave had drawn me into the history of incandescence, of the rare earths and metallic filaments that glowed and incandescenced brilliantly when heated. He had inducted me into the energetics of chemical reactions—how heat was absorbed or emitted during the course of these; heat that sometimes became visible as fire and flame.

Through Uncle Abe, I was drawn into the history of “cold” light—luminescence—which started perhaps before there was any language to record things, with observations of fireflies and glow-worms and will-o’-the-wisps and luminous seas, and of St. Elmo’s fire, the eerie luminous discharges that could stream from a ship’s masts, giving its sailors a feeling of bewitchment.

Abe’s first love was the investigation of fluorescence and phosphorescence—the power of certain substances to absorb radiant energy like ultraviolet or

X-rays and reëmit it as light in the visible range—and he had developed and patented a luminous paint containing radium which was used in military gun-sights during the First World War (and may have been decisive, he told me, in the Battle of Jutland).

His attic was a wondrous place, full of electric machines and induction coils, batteries and magnets, and sealed vacuum tubes (Geissler tubes) of rarefied gases which when electrified would light up with brilliant colors—neon red, helium yellow. It was here, with Abe, that I learned about electricity and color and fluorescence; with Abe (and his ten milligrams of radium bromide) that I learned something about the wonders and dangers of radioactivity. (His own hands were covered with radium burns and malignant warts, from his long, careless handling of radioactive materials.) It was with Abe, too, that I learned about spectroscopy—putting different elements into the colorless flame of a Bunsen burner and looking at the radiant spectra they emitted; seeing how these were unique to each element. Spectroscopy became one of my delights as a boy. Most especially, Abe dwelt on the mysterious spacing of the spectral lines, how (at least in hydrogen) they followed a simple formula, and how this was to remain tantalizingly unexplained for almost thirty years, like the periodicity of the



“Oh, look, dear—crime’s back!”

elements in the Periodic Table itself.

It was through Uncle Abe that I learned of the incredible scientific events of 1913. It was "the year the world changed," he would always say, with Bohr's quantal model of the atom and Moseley's X-ray spectrography of the elements confirming between them the Periodic Table, providing an electronic understanding of the chemical properties of the elements (as well as the spacing of their spectral lines), in terms of a new and radical theory of the atom.

Prior to this, as Bohr remarked, spectra seemed as beautiful and meaningless as butterflies' wings, but now, in the words of another great pioneer, Arnold Sommerfeld, they were revealed as "a true atomic music of the spheres." Uncle Abe spoke of the sense of brilliant light, of sudden, profound understanding, that came to many chemists and physicists at this time, and how it was suddenly overwhelmed by the terribleness of the Great War.

VI—THE END OF THE AFFAIR

WITH the ending of the war, other triumphs were soon to come: an understanding of why metals were lustrous, why they conducted heat and

electricity, the nature of color, of luminescence, of density, of magnetism—all the questions I had puzzled over as a boy. There was an exuberance at this. But the promise held a threat, too: What would become of classical chemistry now? What need was there for it, if the new theory was so powerful?

I had dreamed of becoming a chemist, but the chemistry that really stirred me was the lovingly detailed, naturalistic, descriptive chemistry of the nineteenth century, not the new chemistry of the quantum age, which, so far as I understood it, was highly abstract and, in a sense, closer to physics than to chemistry. Chemistry as I knew it, the chemistry I loved, was either finished or changing its character, advancing beyond me.

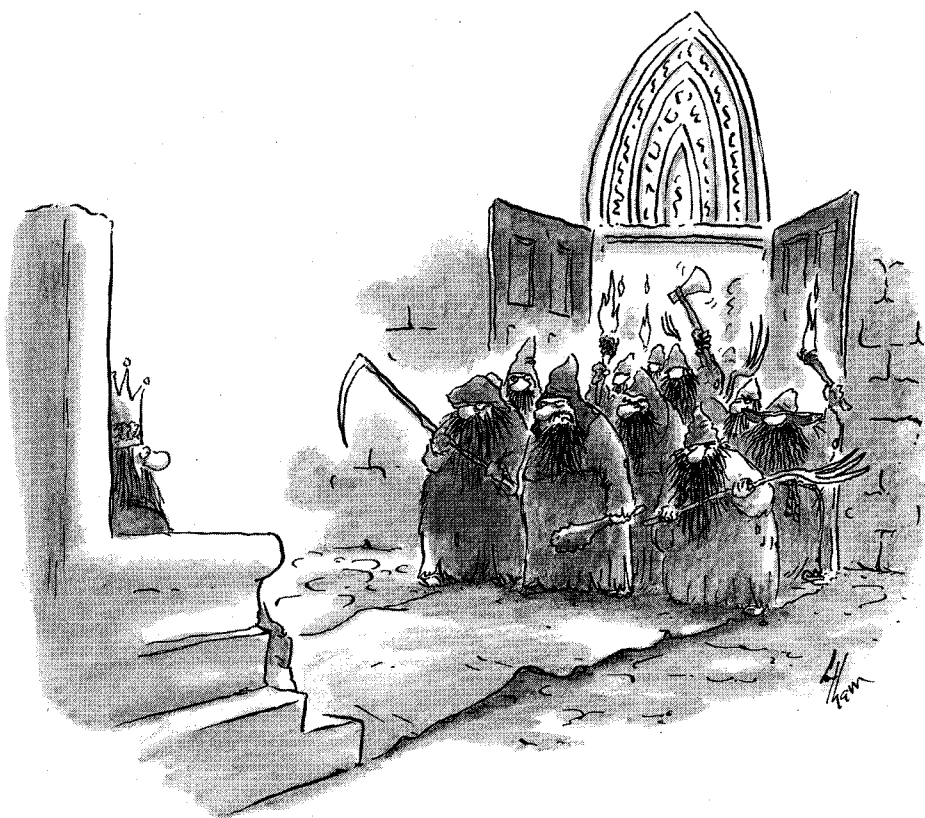
From this point, chemistry seemed to recede from my mind—my love affair, my passion for it, came to an end. There were, perhaps, other factors as well. I had been living (it seems to me in retrospect) in a sort of sweet interlude, having left behind the horrors and fears of Greystone. I had been guided to a region of order, and a passion for science, by two very wise, affectionate, and understanding uncles. My parents had been supportive and trusting, had allowed me to put a lab together and

follow my own whims. School, mercifully, had been indifferent to what I was doing—I did my schoolwork, and was otherwise left to my own devices. Perhaps, too, there was a biological respite, the special calm of latency.

But now all this was to change: adolescence rushed upon me, like a typhoon, buffeting me with insatiable longings. And at school I left the undemanding classics "side," and moved to the pressured science side instead. I had been spoiled, in a sense, by my two uncles, and the freedom and spontaneity of my apprenticeship. Now, at school, I was forced to sit in classes, to take notes and exams, to use textbooks that were flat, impersonal, deadly. What had been fun, delight, when I did it in my own way became an aversion, an ordeal, when I had to do it to order. In his essay "To Teach or Not to Teach," Freeman Dyson speaks of different sorts of people: students who are best given independence, allowed and encouraged to develop in their own way, and those who profit most from structured teaching, from school. I was clearly one who flourished best alone.

Was it, then, the end of chemistry? My own intellectual limitations? Adolescence? School? Or was it, more simply, that I was growing up, and that "growing up" makes one forget the lyrical, mystical perceptions of childhood, the glory and the freshness of which Wordsworth wrote, so that they fade into the light of common day?

AFTER all, it was "understood," by the time I was fourteen, that I was going to be a doctor; my parents were doctors, my brothers in medical school. My parents had been tolerant, even pleased, with my early interests in science, but now, they seemed to feel, the time for play was over. One incident stays clearly in my mind. In 1947, a couple of summers after the war, I was with my parents in our old Humber touring the South of France. Sitting in the back, I was talking about thallium, rattling on and on about it: how it was discovered, along with indium, in the eighteen-sixties by the brilliant-colored green line in its spectrum; how some of its salts, when dissolved, could form solutions nearly five times as dense as water; how thallium indeed was the platypus of the elements, with paradox-



"We found the spare key under the welcome mat."

ical qualities that had caused uncertainty about its proper placement in the Periodic Table—soft, heavy, and fusible, like lead, chemically akin to gallium and indium, but with dark oxides like those of manganese and iron, and colorless sulfates like those of sodium and potassium. As I babbled on, gaily, narcissistically, blindly, I did not notice that my parents, in the front seat, had fallen completely silent, their faces bored, tight, and disapproving—until, after twenty minutes, they could bear it no longer, and my father burst out violently: “Enough about thallium!”

No doubt anyone would have responded the same way. But now, the message came through, it was time to grow up, to be serious, to work—these words were used again and again—for the training of a doctor was long, hard, and demanding.

THE old lab bench has now become a thing of the past. When I paid a visit not long ago to the old building in Finchley which had been Griffin & Tatlock's home a half century ago, it was no longer there. Such shops, such suppliers, which had provided chemicals and simple apparatus and unimaginable delights for generations, have now all but vanished.

And yet the old enthusiasm, which I had thought dead at fourteen, survives, clearly, deep inside me, and surfaces every so often, in odd associations and impulses. A sudden desire for a ball of cadmium, or to feel the coldness of diamond against my face. The license plates of cars immediately suggest elements, especially in New York, where so many of them begin with U, V, W, and Y—that is, uranium, vanadium, tungsten, and yttrium. It is an added pleasure, a bonus, a grace, if the symbol of an element is followed by its atomic number, as in W74 or Y39. Flowers, too, bring elements to mind: the color of lilacs in spring for me is that of divalent vanadium.

I often dream of chemistry at night, dreams that conflate the past and the present, the grid of the Periodic Table transformed to the grid of Manhattan. The location of tungsten, at the intersection of Group VI and Period 6, becomes synonymous here with the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Sixth Street. (There is no such intersection in



“All this talk of Viagra and penile implants reminds me of a charming story about my own penis.”

New York, of course, but it exists, is conspicuous, in the New York of my dreams.) I dream of eating hamburgers made of scandium. Sometimes, too, I dream of the indecipherable language of tin (a confused memory, perhaps, of its plaintive “cry”). But my favorite dream is of going to the opera (I am Hafnium), sharing a box at the Met with the other heavy transition metals—my old and valued friends—Tantalum, Tungsten, Rhenium, Osmium, Iridium, Platinum, and Gold.

Yet it is not just dreams and associations, nostalgic yearnings, that prick my imagination now but hearing of the new achievements of chemistry—a chemistry that, if less personal than the old, has come to embrace the whole world and the universe. In my day, elements stopped with No. 92, uranium, but now elements up to 118 have been made. These new elements exist only in the lab, and may not occur anywhere else in the universe. The very latest of them, though still radioactive, belong to a long-sought “island of stability,” where their atomic nuclei are almost a million times stabler than those of the

preceding elements. We have seen moon rocks and Mars rocks, containing minerals never before seen. We wonder about giant planets with cores of metallic hydrogen, stars made of diamond, and stars with crusts of iron helide. The inert gases have been coaxed into combination, and I have seen a fluoride of xenon, unthinkable in the nineteen-forties. A totally unexpected new form of carbon has been made, forming exquisite, soccerball-shaped giant molecules (buckminsterfullerene, “buckyballs” for short). Scandium is now used in the fins of missiles—and in bicycles. The rare-earth elements, which both Uncle Tungsten and Uncle Abe so loved, have now become common and found countless uses in fluorescent materials, phosphors of every color, high-temperature superconductors, and tiny magnets of an unbelievable strength.

These things, and a thousand others, excite me, stir me, set the imagination running in every direction; and they show me that, though I and the world may have changed beyond recognition, the boy who loved chemistry is still kicking inside. ♦



FICTION

THE BARBER'S UNHAPPINESS

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

MORNINGS the barber left his stylists inside and sat out front of his shop, drinking coffee and ogling every woman in sight. He ogled old women and pregnant women and women whose photographs were passing on the sides of buses and, this morning, a woman with close-cropped black hair and tear-stained cheeks, who wouldn't be half bad if she'd just make an effort, clean up her face a little and invest in some decent clothes, some white tights and a short skirt maybe, knee boots and a cowboy hat and a cigarillo, say, and he pictured her kneeling on a crude Mexican sofa in a little mud hut, daring him to take her,

and soon they'd screwed their way into some sort of bean field while gaucho guys played soft guitars, although actually he'd better put the gaucho guys behind some trees or a rock wall so they wouldn't get all hot and bothered from watching the screwing and swoop down and stab him and have their way with Miss Hacienda as he bled to death, and, come to think of it, forget the gauchos altogether, he'd just put some soft guitars on the stereo in the hut and leave the door open, although actually what was a stereo doing in a Mexican hut? Were there outlets? Plus how could he meet her? He could compliment her hair, then ask her out for coffee. He

could say that, as a hair-care professional, he knew a little about hair, and boy did she ever have great hair, and by the way did she like coffee? Except they always said no. Lately no no no was all he got. Plus he had zero access to a bean field or mud hut. They could do it in his yard, but it wouldn't be the same, because Jeepers had basically made of it a museum of poop, plus Ma would call 911 at the first hint of a sexy moan.

Miss Hacienda passed through a gap in a hedge and disappeared into the Episcopal church.

Why was she going into church on a weekday? Maybe she had a problem. Maybe she was knocked up. Maybe if

© 1999 ARCHIVES OF MILTON H. GREENE, "EMBRACE"

he followed her into the church and told her he knew a little about problems, having been born with no toes, she'd have coffee with him. He was tired of going home to just Ma. Lately she'd been falling asleep with her head on his shoulder while they watched TV. Sometimes he worried that somebody would look in the window and wonder why he'd married such an old lady. Plus sometimes he worried that Ma would wake up and catch him watching the black girl in the silver bikini riding her horse through that tidal pool in slow motion on 1-900-DREMGAL. He wondered how Miss Hacienda would look in a silver bikini in slow motion. Although if she was knocked up she shouldn't be riding a horse. She should be sitting down, taking it easy. Somebody should be bringing her a cup of tea. She should move in with him and Ma. He wouldn't rub it in that she was knocked up. He'd be loving about it. He'd be a good friend to her and wouldn't even try to screw her, and pretty soon she'd start wondering why not and start really wanting him. He'd be her labor coach and cheerfully change diapers in the wee hours and finally when she'd lost all the pregnancy weight she'd come to his bed and screw his brains out in gratitude, after which he'd have a meditative smoke by the window and decide to marry her. He nearly got tears in his eyes thinking of how she'd get tears in her eyes as he went down on one knee to pop the question, a nice touch the dolt who'd knocked her up wouldn't have thought of in a million years, the nimrod, and that S.O.B. could drive by as often as he wanted, deeply regretting his foolishness as the baby frolicked in the yard, it was too late, they were a family, and nothing would ever break them up.

But he'd have to remember to stick a towel under the door while meditatively smoking or Ma would have a cow, because after he smoked she always claimed everything smelled like smoke, and made him wash every piece of clothing in the house. And they'd better screw quietly if they weren't married, because Ma was old-fashioned. It was sort of a pain living with Ma. But Miss Hacienda had better be prepared to tolerate Ma, who was actually pretty good company when she stayed on her meds, and so what if she was nearly eighty

and went around the house flossing in her bra? It was her damn house. He'd better never hear Miss Hacienda say a word against Ma, who'd paid his way through barber college, like for example asking why Ma had thick sprays of gray hair growing out of her ears, because that would kill Ma, who was always reminding the gas man she'd been a dish in high school. How would Miss Hacienda like it if after a lifetime of hard work she got wrinkled and forgetful and some knocked-up slut dressed like a Mexican cowgirl moved in and started complaining about her ear hair? Who did Miss Hacienda think she was, the Queen of Sheba? She could go into labor in the damn Episcopal church for all he cared, he'd keep wanking it in the pantry on the little milking stool for the rest of his life before he'd let Ma be hurt, and that was final.

As Miss Hacienda came out of the church she saw a thick-waisted, beak-nosed, middle-aged man rise angrily from a wooden bench and stomp into Mickey's Hairport, slamming the door behind him.

NEXT morning Ma wanted an omelette. When he said he was running late, she said never mind in a tone that made it clear she was going to accidentally on purpose burn herself again while ostensibly making her own omelette. So he made the omelette. When he asked was it good, she said it was fine, which meant it was bad and he had to make pancakes. So he made pancakes. Then he kissed her cheek and flew out the door, very, very late for Remedial Driving School.

Remedial Driving School was being held in what had been a trendy office park in the Carter years and was now a flat white overgrown stucco bunker with tinted windows and a towable signboard that said "Driving School." Inside was a conference table that smelled like a conference table sitting in direct sunlight with some spilled burned coffee on it.

"Latecomers will be beaten," said the Driving School instructor.

"Sorry," said the barber.

"Joking!" said the instructor, thrusting a wad of handouts at the barber, who was trying to get his clip-ons off. "What I was just saying was that, our aim is, we're going to be looking at

some things or aspects, in terms of driving? Meaning safety, meaning, is speeding something we do in a vacuum, or could it involve a pedestrian or fatality or a family out for a fun drive, and then here you come, speeding, with the safety or destiny of that family not held firmly in your mind, and what happens next? Who knows?"

"A crash?" said someone.

"An accident?" said someone else.

"I didn't hit nobody," said a girl in a T-shirt that said "Buggin'." "Cop just stopped me."

"But I'm talking the possibility aspect?" the instructor said kindly.

"Oh," said the Buggin' girl, who now seemed chastened and convinced.

Outside the tinted window were a little forest and a stream and an insurance agency and a FedEx drop-off tilted by some pipeline digging. There were six students. One was the barber. One was a country boy with a briefcase, who took laborious notes and kept asking questions with a furrowed brow, as if, having been caught speeding, he was now considering a career in law enforcement. Did radar work via sonar beams? How snotty did someone have to get before you could stun them with your stun gun? Next to the country boy was the Buggin' girl. Next to the Buggin' girl was a very, very happy crew-cut older man in a cowboy shirt and bolo tie who laughed at everything and seemed to consider it a great privilege to be here at the driving school on this particular day with this particular bunch of excellent people, and who by the end of the session had proposed holding a monthly barbecue at his place so they wouldn't lose touch. Across the table from the Happy Man was a white-haired woman who kept making sly references to films and books the barber had never heard of and rolling her eyes at things the instructor said, while writing "Help Me!" and "Beam Me Up!" on her notepad and shoving it across the table for the Happy Man to read, which seemed to make the Happy Man uncomfortable.

Next to the white-haired woman was a pretty girl. A very pretty girl. Wow. One of the prettiest girls the barber had ever seen. Boy was she pretty. Her hair was crimped and waist-length and her eyes were doelike and Egyptian and about her there was a sincerity and

intelligence that made it hard for him to look away. She certainly looked out of place here at the conference table, with one hand before her in a strip of sunlight which shone on a very pretty turquoise ring that seemed to confirm her as someone exotic and darkish and schooled in things Eastern, someone you could easily imagine making love to on a barge on the Nile, say, surrounded by thousands of candles that smelled weird, or come to think of it maybe she was American Indian, and he saw her standing at the door of a tepee wearing that same sincere and intelligent expression as he came home from the hunt with a long string of dead rabbits, having been accepted into the tribe at her request after killing a cute rabbit publicly to prove he was a man of the woods, or actually they had let him skip the rabbit part because he had spoken to them so frankly about the white man's deviousness and given them secret information about an important fort after first making them promise not to kill any women or children. He pictured one of the braves saying to her, as she rubbed two corncocks together in the dying sunlight near a spectacular mesa, that she was lucky to have the barber, and silently she smiled, rubbing the corncocks together perhaps a little faster, remembering the barber naked in their tepee, although on closer inspection it appeared she was actually probably Italian.

The girl looked up and caught him staring at her. He dropped his eyes and began leafing through his course materials.

The instructor asked did anyone know how many Gs a person pulled when he or she went through a windshield at eighty miles per after hitting a cow.

No one knew.

The instructor said quite a few.

The Happy Man said he'd had a feeling it was quite a few, which was why, wasn't it, that people died?

"So what's my point?" the instructor said, pointing with his pointer to an overhead of a cartoon man driving a little car toward a tombstone while talking gaily on a car phone. "Say we're feeling good, very good, or bad, which is the opposite, say we've just had a death or a

promotion or the birth of a child or a fight with our wife or spouse. Because what we then maybe forget is that two tons of car is what you are inside of, driving, and I hope not speeding, although for the sake of this pretend example I'm afraid we have to assume yes, you are, which is how this next bad graphic occurs."

Now on the overhead the cartoon man's body parts were scattered and his car phone was flying up to Heaven on



little angel wings. The barber looked at the pretty girl again. She smiled at him. His heart began to race. This never happened. They never smiled back. Well, she was young. Maybe she didn't know better than to smile back at an older guy she didn't want. Or maybe she wanted him. Maybe she'd had it with young horny guys just out for quick rolls in the hay, and wanted someone old enough to really appreciate her, who didn't come too quickly and owned his own business and knew how to pick up after himself. He hoped she was a strict religious virgin who'd never had a roll in the hay. Not that he hoped she was frigid. He hoped she was the kind of strict religious virgin who, once married, would let it all hang out, and when not letting it all hang out would move with quiet dignity in conservative clothes so that no one would suspect how completely and totally she could let it all hang out when she chose to, and that she came from a poor family and could therefore really appreciate the hard work that went into running a small business, and maybe even had some accounting experience and could help with the books. Although truthfully, even if she'd had hundreds of rolls in the hay and couldn't add a stinking row of figures, he didn't care, she was so pretty, they'd work it out, assuming of course she'd have him, and with a sinking heart he thought of his missing toes. He remembered that day at the lake with Mary Ellen Kovski, when it had been over a hundred degrees and he'd sat on a beach chair fully dressed, claiming to be chilly. A crowd of Mary Ellen's friends had gathered to help her undress him and throw him in, and in desperation he'd whispered to her about his toes, and she'd gone white and called

off her friends and two months later married Phil Anpesto, that idiotic beanpole. Oh, he was tired of hiding his toes. Maybe this girl had a wisdom beyond her years. Maybe her father had a deformity, a glass eye or a facial scar, maybe through long years of loving this kindly but deformed man she had come to almost need the man she loved to be somewhat deformed. Not that he liked the idea of her trotting after a bunch of deformed guys, and also not that he considered himself deformed, exactly, although, admittedly, ten barely discernible bright-pink nubs were no picnic. He pictured her lying nude in front of a fireplace, so comfortable with his feet that she'd given each nub a pet name, and sometimes during lovemaking she got a little carried away and tried to lick his nubs, although certainly he didn't expect that, and in fact found it sort of disgusting, and for a split second he thought somewhat less of her, then pictured himself gently pulling her up, away from his feet, and the slightly shamed look on her face made him forgive her completely for the disgusting thing she'd been about to do out of her deep deep love for him.

The instructor held up a small bloodied baby doll, which he then tossed across the room into a trunk.

"Blammo," he said. "Let's let that trunk represent a tomb, and it's your fault, from speeding. How then do you feel?"

"Bad," said the Buggin' girl.

The pretty girl passed the barber the Attendance Log, which had to be signed to obtain Course Credit and Associated Conviction Waivers/Point Reductions.

They looked frankly at each other for what felt like a very long time.

"Hokay!" the instructor said brightly. "I suppose I don't have to grind you into absolute putty, so now it's a break, so you don't view me as some sort of Marquis de Sade requiring you to watch gross visuals and graphics until your mind rots out."

The barber took a deep breath. He would speak to her. Maybe buy her a soda. The girl stood up. The barber got a shock. Her face was the same lovely exotic intelligent slim Cleopatra face, but her body seemed scaled to a head twice the size of the one she had. She

was a big girl. Her arms were round and thick. Her mannerisms were a big girl's mannerisms. She hunched her shoulders and tugged at her smock. He felt a little miffed at her for having misled him and a little miffed at himself for having ogled such a fatty. Well, not a fatty, exactly, her body was O.K., it seemed solid enough, it was just too big for her head. If you could somehow reduce the body to put it in scale with the head, or enlarge the head and shrink down the entire package, then you'd have a body that would do justice to that beautiful, beautiful face that he, even now, tidying up his handouts, was regretting having lost.

"Hi," she said.

"Hello," he said, and went outside and sat in his car, and when she came out with two Cokes he pretended to be cleaning his ashtray until she went away.

A MONTH or so later the barber sat stiffly at a wedding reception at the edge of a kind of mock Japanese tearoom at the Hilton while some goof-ball inside a full-body PuppetPlayers groom costume, complete with top hat and tails and a huge yellow felt head and three-fingered yellow felt hands, was making vulgar thrusting motions with his hips in the barber's direction, as if to say: Do you like to do this? Have you done this? Can you show me how to do this, because soon I'm going to have to do this with that PuppetPlayers bride over there!

Everyone was laughing and giving the barber inexplicable thumbs-ups as the PuppetPlayers groom then dragged the PuppetPlayers bride across the dance floor and introduced her to the barber, and she appeared to be very taken with him, and sat on his lap and forced his head into her yellow felt cleavage, which was stained with wine and had a big cigarette burn at the neckline. Then the PuppetPlayers newlyweds sprinted across the room and bowed low before the real newlyweds, Arnie and Evelyn, who were sitting sullenly on the bandstand, apparently in the middle of a snit.

"Mickey!" Uncle Edgar shouted to the barber. "Mickey, you should've boffed that puppet broad! So what if she's a puppet! You're no prize! You're going to be choosy? Think of it! Think of it! Arnie's half your age!"

"Edgar, for Christ's sake, you're embarrassing him!" shouted Aunt Jean. "It's like you're saying he's old! Like he's an old maid, only he's a guy! See what I mean? You think that's nice?"

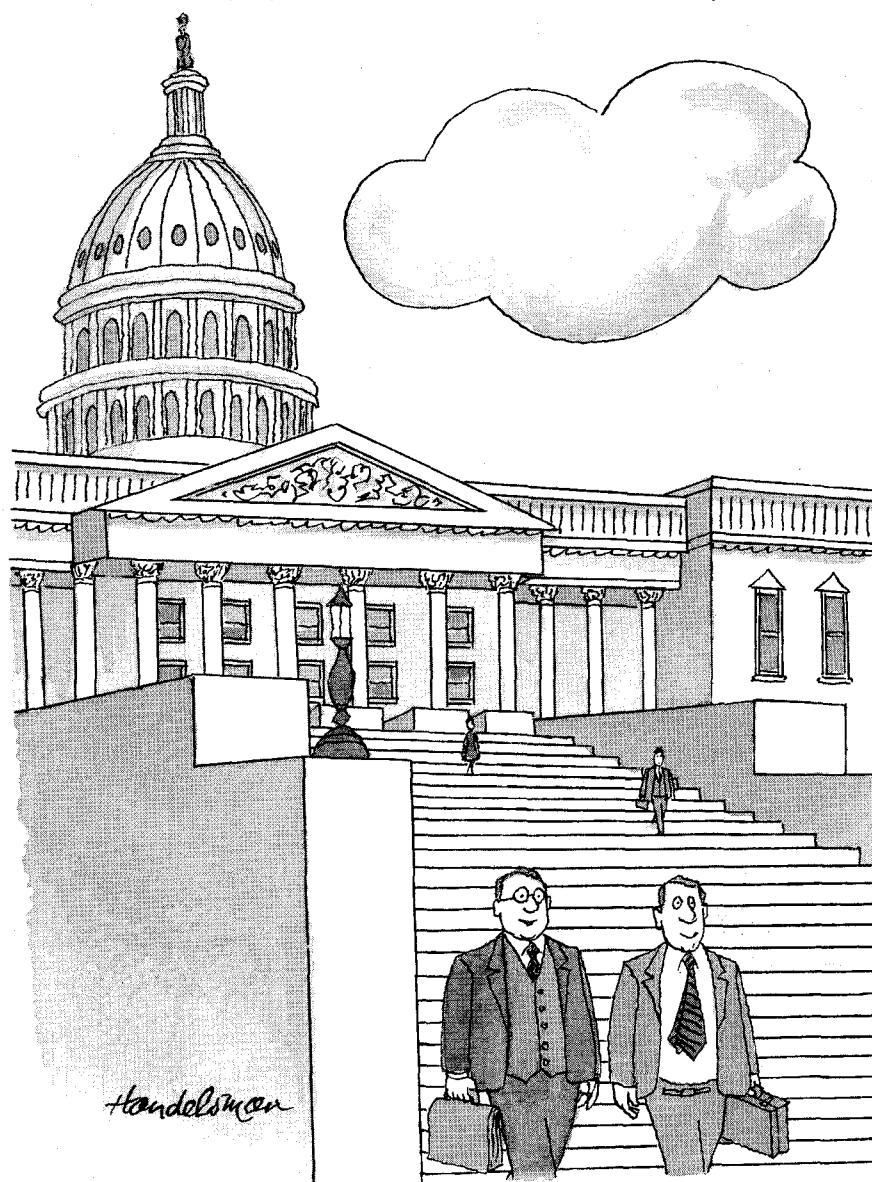
"I am!" shouted Uncle Edgar. "I am saying that! He's a damned old lady! I don't mean no offense! I'm just saying, Get out and live! I love him! That's why I'm saying! The sun's setting! Pork some young babe, and if you like it, if you like the way she porks, what the hell, put down roots! What do you care? Love you can learn! But you gotta start somewhere! I mean, my God, even these little so-and-sos here are trying to get some of it!"

And Uncle Edgar threw a dinner roll at a group of four adolescent boys whom the barber vaguely remembered

having once pulled around the block in a little red wagon. The boys gave Uncle Edgar the finger and said that not only were they trying to get some of it, they were actually getting some of it, and not always from the same chick, and sometimes more than once a day, and sometimes right after football practice, and quite possibly in the near future from a very hot shop teacher they had reason to believe would probably give it to all of them at once if only they approached it the right way.

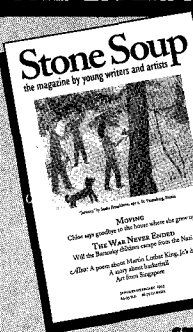
"Holy Cow!" shouted Uncle Edgar. "Let me go to that school!"

"Edgar, you pig, be logical!" shouted Aunt Jean. "Just because Mickey's not married don't mean he ain't getting any! He could be getting some from a lady friend, or several lady friends, lady



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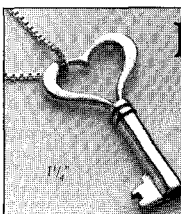
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friends his own age, who already know the score, whose kids are full grown! You don't know what goes on in his bed at night!" Now the PuppetPlayers groom was trying to remove the real bride's garter, and some little suited boys were walking a ledge along a goldfish stream that separated the Wedding Area from Okinawa Memories, where several clearly non-Japanese women in kimonos were hustling drinks. The little suited boys began prying up the screen that kept the goldfish from going over a tiny waterfall, to see if they would die in a shallow pond near the Vending Area.

"For example, those kids torturing those fish," shouted Uncle Edgar. "You know who those kids are? They are Brendan's kids. You know who Brendan is? He's Dick's kid. You remember Dick? Your second cousin the same age as you, man! Remember I took you guys to the ballgame and he threw up in my Rambler? So them kids are Dick's grandkids, and here Dick's the same age as you, which means you're old enough to be a grandpa, Grandpa, but you ain't even a pa yet, which I don't know how you feel about it but I think is sort of sad or weird!"

"You do, but maybe he don't!" shouted Aunt Jean. "Why do you think everything you think is everything everybody else thinks? Plus Dick's no saint and neither are those kids! Dick was a teen dad and Brendan was a teen dad and probably those kids on that ledge are going to be teen dads as soon as they finish killing those poor fish!"

"Agreed!" shouted Uncle Edgar. "Hey, I got no abiding love for Dick! You want to have a fight with me at a wedding over my feelings for Dick, whose throwing up in my Rambler was just the start of the crap he's pulled on me? All's I'm saying is, there's no danger of Mickey here being a teen dad, and he better think about what I'm saying and get on the stick before his shooter ain't a viable shooter no more!"

"I'm sure you start talking about the poor guy's shooter at a wedding!" shouted Aunt Jean. "You're drunk!"

"Who ain't?" shouted Uncle Edgar, and the table exploded in laughter and one of the adolescents fell mock-drunk off his chair and when this got a laugh

all the other adolescents fell mock-drunk off their chairs.

The barber excused himself and walked quickly out of the Wedding Area past three stunning girls in low-cut white gowns, who stood in what would have been shade from the fake overhanging Japanese cherry trees had the trees been outside and had it been daytime.

In the bathroom the Oriental theme receded and all was shiny chrome. The barber peed, mentally defending himself against Uncle Edgar. First off, he'd had plenty of women. Five. Five wasn't bad. Five was more than most guys, and for sure it was more than Uncle Edgar, who'd married Jean right out of high school and had a lower lip like a fish. Who would Uncle Edgar have had him marry? Sara DelBianco, with her little red face? Ellen Wiest, that tall drink of water? Ann DeMann, who was sway-backed and had claimed he was a bad screw? Why in the world was he, a successful small businessman, expected to take advice from someone who'd spent the best years of his life transferring partial flanges from one conveyor belt to another while spraying them with a protective solvent mist?

The barber wet his comb the way he'd been wetting his comb since high school and prepared to slick back his hair. A big vital man with a sweaty face came in and whacked the barber on the back as if they were old pals. In the mirror was a skeletal mask that the barber knew was his face but couldn't quite believe was his face, because in the past his face could always be counted on to amount to more than the sum of its parts when he smiled winningly, but now when he smiled winningly he looked like a corpse trying to appear cheerful in a wind tunnel. His eyes bulged, his lips were thin, his forehead wrinkles were deep as stick lines in mud. It had to be the lighting. He was ugly. He was old. How had this happened? Who would want him now?

"You look like hell," thundered the big man from a stall, and the barber fled the mirror without slicking back his hair.

As he rushed past the stunning girls, a boy in a fraternity sweatshirt came over. Seeing the barber, he made a comic geriatric coughing noise in his throat, and

one of the girls giggled and adjusted her shoulder strap as if to keep the barber from seeing down her dress.

A FEW weeks before the wedding, the barber had received in the mail a greeting card showing a cowboy roping a steer. The barber's name was scrawled across the steer's torso and "Me (Mr. Jenks)" across the cowboy.

"Here's hoping you will remember me from our driving school," said a note inside, "and attend a small barbecue at my home. My hope being to renew those acquaintances we started back then, which I found enjoyable and which since the loss of my wife I've had far too few of. Please come and bring nothing. As you can see from the cover, I am roping you in, not to brand you but only to show you my hospitality, I hope. Your friend, Larry Jenks."

Who was Jenks? Was Jenks the Happy Man? The barber threw the card in the bathroom trash, imagining the Driving School kooks seated glumly on folding chairs in a trailer house. For a week or so the card sat there, cowboy side up, vaguely reproaching him. Then he took out the trash.

A few days after the wedding, he received a second card from Jenks, with a black flower on the front.

"A good time was had by all," it said. "Sorry you were unable to attend. Even the younger folks, I think, enjoyed. Many folks took home quite a few sodas, because, as I am alone now, I never could have drank that many sodas in my life. This note, on a sadder note, and that is why the black flower, is to inform you that Eldora Ronsen is moving to Seattle. You may remember her as the older woman to your immediate right. She is high up in her company and just got higher, which is good for her but bad for us, as she is such a super gal. Please join us Tuesday next, Corri-gan's Pub, for farewell drinks, map enclosed, your friend, Larry Jenks."

Tuesday next was tomorrow.

"Well, you can't go," Ma said. "The girls are coming over."

The girls were the Rosary and Altar Society. When they came over he had to wait on them hand and foot while they talked about which priest they would marry if only the priests weren't priests. When one lifted her blouse to

show her recent scar, he had to say it was the worst scar ever. When one asked if her eye looked rheumy, he had to get very close to her rheumy eye and say it looked non-rheumy to him.

"Well, I think I might want to go," he said.

"I just said you can't," she said. "The girls are coming."

She was trying to guilt him. Once she'd faked a seizure when he tried to go to Detroit for a hair show.

"Ma," he said. "I'm going."

"Mr. Big Shot," she said. "Bullying an old lady."

"I'm not bullying you," he said. "And you're not old."

"Oh, I'm young, I'm a tiny baby," she said, tapping her dentures.

That night he dreamed of the pretty but heavy girl. In his dream she was all slimmed down. Her body looked like the body of Daisy Mae in the "Li'l Abner" cartoon. She came into the shop in cut-off jeans, chewing a blade of grass, and said she found his accomplishments amazing, especially considering the hardships he'd had to overcome, like his dad dying young and his mother being so nervous, and then she took the blade of grass out of her mouth and put it on the magazine table and stretched out across the Waiting Area couch while he undressed, and seeing his unit she said it was the biggest unit she'd ever seen, and arched her back in a sexy way, and then she called him over and gave him a deep warm kiss on the mouth that was so much like the kiss he'd been waiting for all his life that it abruptly woke him.

Sitting up in bed, he missed her. He missed how much she loved and understood him. She knew everything about him and yet still liked him. His gut sort of ached with wanting.

In his boyhood mirror he caught sight of himself and flexed his chest the way he used to flex his chest in the weight-lifting days, and looked so much like a little old man trying to take a dump in his bed that he hopped up and stood panting on the round green rug.

Ma was blundering around in the hallway. Because of the dream, he had a partial bone. To hide his partial bone, he kept his groin behind the door as he thrust his head into the hall.

"I was walking in my sleep," Ma

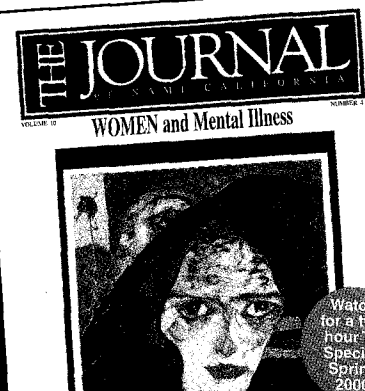
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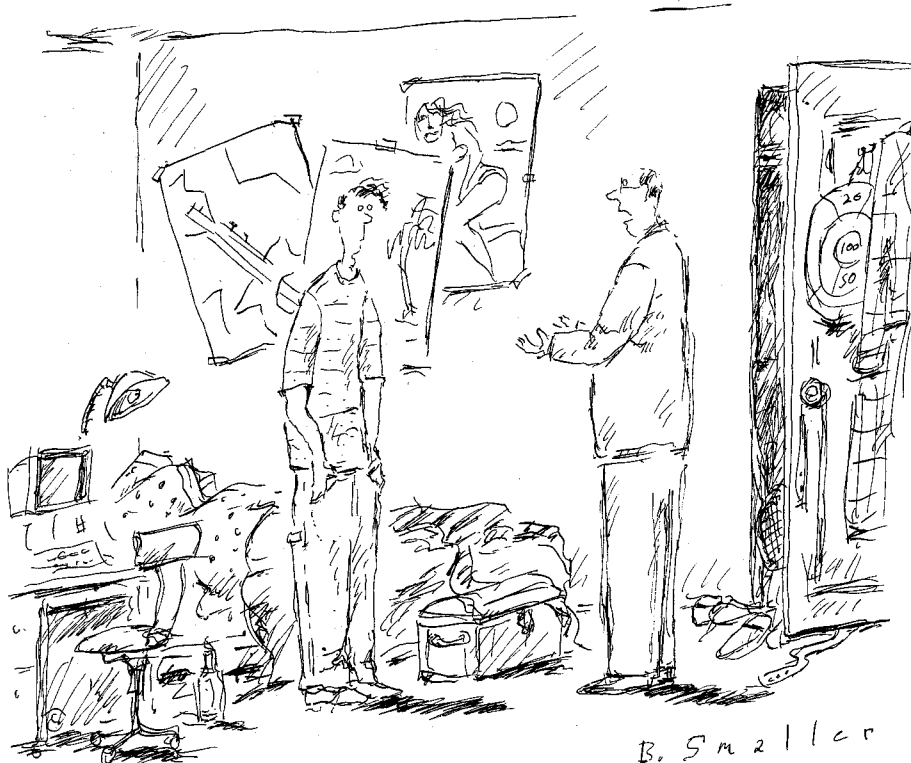
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"But why can't we question authority together?"

said. "I'm so worried I was walking in my sleep."

"What are you worried about?" he said.

"I'm worried about when the girls come," she said.

"Well, don't worry," he said. "It'll be fine."

"Thanks a million," she said, going back into her room. "Very reassuring."

Well, it would be fine. If they ran out of coffee, one of the old ladies could make coffee, if they ran out of snacks they could go a little hungry, if something really disastrous happened they could call him at Corrigan's, he'd leave Ma the number.

Because he was going.

In the morning he called Jenks and accepted the invitation, while Ma winced and clutched her stomach and pulled over a heavy wooden chair and collapsed into it.

CORRIGAN'S was meant to feel like a pub at the edge of a Scottish golf course, there was a roaring fire, and many ancient-looking golf clubs hanging above tremendous tables of a hard plastic material meant to appear gnarled

and scarred, and kilted waitresses with names like Heather and Zoe were sloshing chicken wings and fried cheese and lobster chunks into metal vats near an aerial photo of the Old Course at St. Andrews, Scotland.

The barber was early. He felt it was polite to be early, except when he was late, at which time he felt being early was anal. Where the heck was everybody? They weren't very polite. He looked down at his special shoes. They were blocky and black and had big removable metal stays in the sides and squeaked when he walked.

"Sorry we're late!" Mr. Jenks shouted, and the Driving School group settled in around the long gnarled table.

The pretty but heavy girl hung her purse across the back of her chair. Her hair looked like her hair in the dream and her eyes looked like her eyes in the dream, and as for her body he couldn't tell, she was wearing a muumuu. But certainly facially she was pretty. Facially she was very possibly the prettiest girl here. Was she? If aliens came down and forced each man to pick one woman to reproduce with in a chain-link enclosure while they took notes, would he

choose her, based solely on face? Here was a woman with a good rear but a doglike face, and there was a woman with a nice perm but a blob at the end of her nose, and there was the Buggin' girl, who looked like a chicken, and the white-haired woman, whose face was all wrinkled, and here was the pretty but heavy girl. Was she the prettiest? Facially? He thought she very possibly was.

He regarded her fondly from across the table, waiting for her to catch him regarding her fondly, so he could quickly avert his eyes, so she'd know he was still possibly interested, and then she dropped her menu and bent to retrieve it and the barber had a chance to look briefly down her dress.

Well, she definitely had something going on in the chest category. So facially she was the prettiest in the room, plus she had decent boobs. Attractive breasts. The thing was, would she want him? He was old. Oldish. When he stood up too fast, his knee joints popped. Lately his gums had started to bleed. Plus he had no toes. Although why sell himself short? Who was perfect? He wasn't perfect and she wasn't perfect but they obviously had some sort of special chemistry, based on what had happened at the Driving School, and, anyway, what the heck, he wasn't proposing, he was just considering possibly trying to get to know her somewhat better.

In this way, he decided to ask the pretty but heavy girl out.

How to do it, that was the thing. How to ask her. He could get her alone and say her hair looked super. While saying it looked super, he could run a curl through his fingers in a professional way, as if looking for split ends. He could say he'd love a chance to cut such excellent hair, then slip her a card for One Free Cut and Coffee. That had worked with Sylvia Reynolds, a bank teller with crow's-feet and a weird laugh who turned out to be an excellent kisser. When she'd come in for her Free Cut and Coffee, he'd claimed they were out of coffee and taken her to Bean Men Roasters. A few dates later they'd got carried away, because of her excellent kissing, and done more than he ever would've imagined doing with someone with crow's-feet and a weird laugh and

strangely wide hips, and when he'd got home that night and had a good hard look inside the locket she'd given him after they'd done it, he'd instantly felt bad, because wow could you ever see the crow's-feet in that picture. As he looked at Sylvia standing in that bright sun-lit meadow in the picture, her head thrown back, joyfully laughing, her crow's-feet so very pronounced, an image had sprung into his mind of her coming wide-hipped toward him while holding a baby, and suddenly he'd been deeply disappointed in himself for doing it with someone so unusual-looking, and to insure that he didn't make matters worse by inadvertently doing it with her a second time he'd sort of never called her again, and had even switched banks.

He glanced at the pretty but heavy girl and found her making her way toward the ladies'.

Now was as good a time as any.

He waited a few minutes, then excused himself and stood outside the ladies', reading ads posted on a corkboard, until the pretty but heavy girl came out.

He cleared his throat and asked was she having fun?

She said yes.

Then he said wow did her hair look great. And in terms of great hair, he knew what he was talking about, he was a professional. Where did she have it cut? He ran one of her curls through his fingers, as if looking for split ends, and said he'd love the chance to work with such dynamite hair, and took from his shirt pocket the card for One Free Cut and Coffee.

"Maybe you could stop by sometime," he said.

"That's nice of you," she said, and blushed.

So she was a shy girl. Sort of cutely nerdy. Not exactly confident. That was too bad. He liked confidence. He found it sexy. On the other hand, who could blame her, he could sometimes be very intimidating. Also her lack of confidence indicated he could perhaps afford to be a little bit bold.

"Like, say, tomorrow?" he said. "Like, say, tomorrow at noon?"

"Ha," she said. "You move quick."

"Not too quick, I hope," he said.

"No," she said. "Not too quick."

So he had her. By saying he wasn't moving too quick, wasn't she implicitly implying that he was moving at exactly the right speed? All he had to do now was close the deal.

"I'll be honest," he said. "I've been thinking about you since Driving School."

"You have?" she said.

"I have," he said.

"So you're saying tomorrow?" she said, blushing again.

"If that's O.K. for you," he said.

"It's O.K. for me," she said.

Then she started uncertainly back to the table, and the barber raced into the men's. Yes! Yes yes yes. It was a date. He had her. He couldn't believe it. He'd really played that smart. What had he been worried about? He was cute, women had always considered him cute, never mind the thin hair and minor gut, there was just something about him women liked.

Wow she was pretty, he had done very very well for himself.

Back at the table, Mr. Jenks was taking Polaroids. He announced his intention of taking six shots of the Driving School group, one for each member to keep, and the barber stood behind the pretty but heavy girl, with his hands on her shoulders, and she reached up and gave his wrist a little squeeze.

At home old-lady cars were in the driveway, and old-lady coats were piled on the couch, and the house smelled like old lady, and the members of the Rosary and Altar Society were gathered around the dining-room table looking frail. The barber could never keep them straight. There was a crone in a lime pants suit, and another crone in a pink pants suit, and two crones in blue pants suits. As he came in they began asking Ma why was he out so late, why hadn't he been here to help, wasn't he normally a fairly good son? And Ma said yes, he was normally a fairly good son, except he hadn't given her any grandkids yet and often wasted water by bathing twice a day.

"My son had that problem," said one of the blue crones. "His wife once pulled me aside."

"Has his wife ever pulled you aside?" the pink crone said to Ma.

"He's not married," said Ma.

"Maybe the not married is related to

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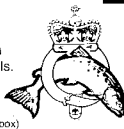
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the bathing too often," said the lime crone.

"Maybe he holds himself aloof from others," said the blue crone. "My son held himself aloof from others."

"My daughter holds herself aloof from others," said the pink crone.

"Does she bathe too often?" said Ma.

"She doesn't bathe too often," said the pink crone. "She just thinks she's smarter than everyone."

"Do you think you're smarter than everyone?" asked the lime crone severely, and thank God at that moment Ma reached up and pulled him down by the shirt and roughly kissed his cheek.

"Have a good time?" she said, and the group photo fell out of his pocket and into the dip.

"Very nice," he said.

"Who are these people?" Ma said, wiping a bit of dip off the photo with her finger. "Are these the people you went to meet? Who is this you're embracing? This big one."

"I'm not embracing her, Ma," he said. "I'm just standing behind her. She's a friend."

"She's big," Ma said. "You smell like beer."

"Actually I don't consider her big," said the barber, in a tone of disinterested interest.

"Whatever you say," said the lime crone.

"He's been drinking," said Ma.

Oh he didn't care what they thought,

he was happy. He jokingly snatched the photo away and dashed up to his room, taking two stairs at a time.

Gabby Gabby Gabby, her name was Gabby, short for Gabrielle.

Tomorrow they had a date for lunch. Breakfast, rather. They'd moved it up to breakfast. While they'd been kissing against her car, she'd said she wasn't sure she could wait until lunch to see him again. He felt the same way. Even breakfast seemed a long time to wait. He wished she was sitting next to him on the bed right now, holding his hand, listening to the sounds of the crones cackling as they left. In his mind, he stroked her hair and said he was glad he'd finally found her, and she said she was glad to have been found, she'd never dreamed that someone so distinguished, with such a broad chest and wide shoulders, could love a girl like her. Was she happy? he tenderly asked. Oh, she was so happy, she said, so happy to be sitting next to this accomplished, distinguished man in this amazing house, which in his mind was not the current house, a pea-green ranch with a tilted cracked sidewalk, but a mansion, on a lake, with a smaller house nearby for Ma, down a very very long wooded path, and he'd paid cash for the mansion with money he'd made from his international chain of barber-shops, each of which was an exact copy of his current barbershop, and when he and Gabby visited his London, En-

gland, shop, leaving Ma behind in the little house, his English barbers would always burst into applause and say, "Jolly good, jolly good," as the happy couple walked in the door.

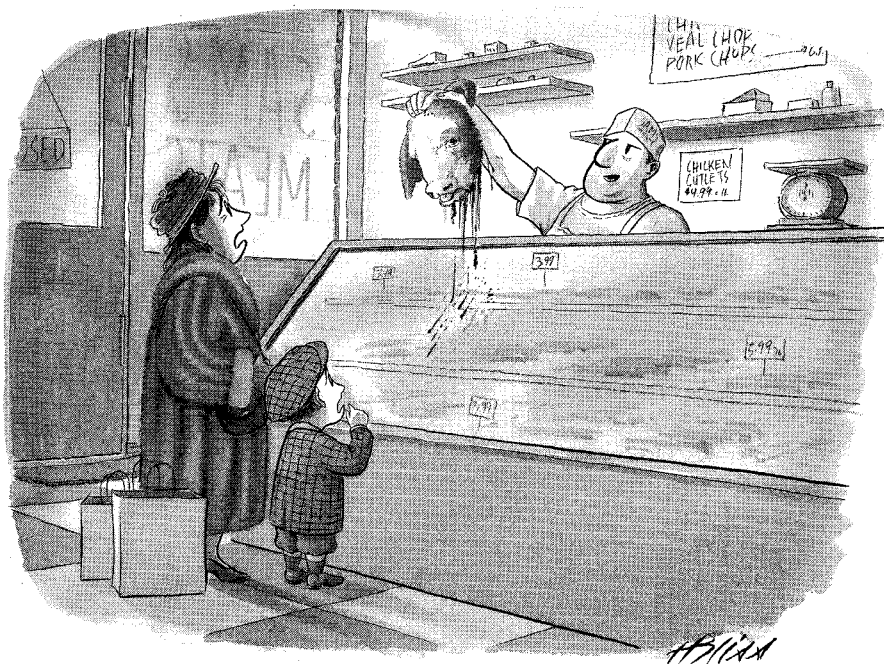
"I'm leaving you the dishes, Romeo," Ma shouted from the bottom of the stairs.

EARLY next morning, he sat in the bath, getting ready for his date. Here was his floating weenie, like some kind of sea creature. He danced his nubs nervously against the tiles, like Fred Astaire dancing on a wall, and swirled the washrag through the water, holding it by one corner, so that it, too, was like a sea creature, a blue ray, a blue monogrammed ray that now crossed the land that was his belly and attacked the sea creature that was his weenie, and remembering what Uncle Edgar had said at the wedding about his shooter not being viable, he gave his shooter a good, hard, reassuring shake, as if congratulating it for being so very viable. It was a great shooter, perfectly fine, in spite of what Ann DeMann had once said about him being a bad screw, it had got hard quick last night and stayed hard throughout the kissing, and wow he wished Uncle Edgar could have seen that big boner.

Oh, he felt good, in spite of a slight hangover he was very happy.

Flipping his unit carelessly from side to side with thumb and forefinger, he looked at the group photo, which he'd placed near the sink. God, she was pretty. He was so lucky. He had a date with a pretty young girl. Ma was nuts, Gabby wasn't big, no bigger than any other girl. Not much bigger, anyway. How wide were her shoulders compared to, say, the shoulders of the Buggin' girl? Well, he wasn't going to dignify that with a response. She was perfect just the way she was. He leaned out of the tub to look closer at the photo. Well, Gabby's shoulders were maybe a little wider than the Buggin' girl's shoulders. Definitely wider. Were they wider than the shoulders of the white-haired woman? Actually, in the photo they were even wider than the shoulders of the country boy.

Oh, he didn't care, he just really liked her. He liked her laugh and the way she had of raising one eyebrow when skeptical, he liked the way that, when he moved his hand to her boob as they leaned against her car, she let out a happy



"You tell me if the roast beef is fresh."

little sigh. He liked how, after a few minutes of kissing her while feeling her boobs, which were super, very firm, when he dropped his hand down between her legs she said she thought that was probably enough for one night, which was good, it showed good morals, it showed she knew when to call it quits.

Ma was in her room, banging things around.

Because for a while there last night he'd been worried. Worried she wasn't going to stop him. Which would have been disappointing. Because she barely knew him. He could've been anybody. For a few minutes there against the car, he'd wondered if she wasn't a little on the easy side. He wondered this now. Did he want to wonder this now? Wasn't that sort of doubting her? No, no, it was fine, there was no sin in looking at things honestly. So was she? Too easy? Why had she so quickly agreed to go out with him? Why so willing to give it away so easily to some old guy she barely knew? Some old balding guy she barely knew? Well, he thought he might know why. Possibly it was due to her size. Possibly the guys her own age had passed her by, due to the big bod, and, nearing thirty, she'd heard her biologic clock ticking and decided it was time to lower her standards, which, possibly, was where he came in. Possibly, seeing him at the Driving School, she'd thought, since all old guys like young girls, big bods notwithstanding, this old pear-shaped balding guy can ergo be had no problem.

Was that it? Was that how it was?

"Some girl just called," Ma said, leaning heavily against the bathroom door. "Some girl, Gabby or Tabby or something? Said you had a date. Wanted you to know she's running late. Is that the same girl? The same fat girl you were embracing?"

Sitting in the tub, he noticed that his penis was gripped nervously in his fist, and let it go, and it fell to one side, as if it had just passed out.

"Do the girl a favor, Mickey," Ma said. "Call it off. She's too big for you. You'll never stick with her. You never stick with anyone. You couldn't even stick with Ellen Wiest, for crying out loud, who was so wonderful, you honestly think you're going to stick with this Tabby or Zippy or whatever?"

Of course Ma had to bring up Ellen

Wiest. Ma had loved Ellen, who had a regal face and great manners and was always kissing up to Ma by saying what a great mother Ma was. He remembered the time he and Ellen had hiked up to Butternut Falls and stood getting wet in the mist, holding hands, smiling sweetly at each other, which had really been fun, and she'd said she thought she loved him, which was nice, except wow she was tall. You could hold hands with her for only so long before your back started to hurt. Plus they'd had that fight on the way down. Well, there were a lot of things about Ellen that Ma wasn't aware of, such as her nasty temper, and he remembered Ellen storming ahead of him on the trail, glaring back now and then, just because he'd made a funny remark about her blocking out the sun, and hadn't he also said something about her being able to eat leaves from the tallest of the trees they were passing under? Well, that had been funny, it had all been in fun, why did she have to get so mad about it? Where was Ellen now? Hadn't she married Ed Trott? Well, Trott could have her. Trott was probably suffering the consequences of being married to Miss Thin Skin even now, and he remembered having recently seen Ed and Ellen at the ValueWay, Ellen pregnant and looking so odd, with her big belly pressing against the cart as she craned that giraffelike neck down to nuzzle Ed, who had a big stupid happy grin on his face like he was the luckiest guy in the world.

The barber stood up angrily from the tub. Here in the mirror were his age-spotted deltoids and his age-spotted roundish pecs and his strange pale love handles.

Ma resettled against the door with a big whump.

"So what's the conclusion, lover boy?" she said. "Are you cancelling? Are you calling up and cancelling?"

"No, I'm not," he said.

"Well, poor her," Ma said.

SOUTH STREET was an old wagon road. Cars took the bend too fast. Often he scowled at the speeding cars on his way to work, imagining the drivers laughing to themselves about the way he walked. Because on days when his special shoes hurt he sort of minced. They hurt today. He shouldn't have worn the

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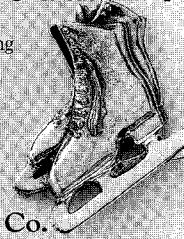
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"Your Honor, has anyone ever told you what a wry, sensuous mouth you have?"

thin gray socks. He was mincing a bit but trying not to, because what if Gabby drove up South on her way to meet him at the shop and saw him mincing?

He turned up Lincoln Avenue and passed the Liquor Mart, and La Belle Époque, the antique store with the joyful dog inside, and as always the joyful dog sprang over the white settee and threw itself against the glass, and then there was Gabby, down the block, peering into his locked shop, and he corrected his mincing and began walking normally, though it killed.

Did she like the shop? He took big bold steps with his head thrown back so he'd look happy. Happy and strong, with all his toes. With all his toes, in the prime of his life. Did she notice how neat the shop was? How professional? Or did she notice that four of the chairs were of one type and the fifth was totally different? Did it seem to her that the shop was geared to old blue-hairs, which was something he'd once heard a young woman say as he took out the trash?

How did she look? Did she look good?

It was still too far to tell.

Now she saw him. Her face brightened, she waved like a little girl. Oh,

she was pretty. It was as if he'd known her forever. She looked so hopeful. But, oops. Oh my God, she was big. She'd dressed all wrong, tight jeans and a tight shirt. As if testing him. Jesus, this was the biggest he'd ever seen her look. What was she doing, testing him, trying to look her worst? Here was an alley, should he swerve into the alley and call her later? Or not. Not call her later? Forget the whole thing? Pretend last night had never happened? Although now she'd seen him. And he didn't want to forget the whole thing. Last night for the first time in a long time he'd felt like someone other than a guy who wanks it on the milking stool in his mother's pantry. Last night he'd bought a pitcher for the Driving School group and Jenks had called him a sport. Last night she'd said he was a sexy kisser.

Thinking about forgetting last night gave him a pit in his stomach. Forgetting last night was not an option. What were the options? Well, she could trim down. That was an option. Maybe all she needed was someone to tell her the simple truth, someone to sit her down and say, Look, you have an incredibly beautiful intelligent face, but from the neck down, sweetie, wow, we've got

some serious work to do. And after their frank talk she'd send him flowers with a card that said, Thanks for your honesty, let's get this thing done. And every night as she stood at the mirror in her panties and bra he'd point out places that needed improvement, and the next day she'd energetically address those areas in the gym, and soon the head-bod discrepancy would be eliminated, and he imagined her in a fancy dress at a little table on a veranda, a veranda by the sea, thanking him for the honeymoon trip, she came from a poor family and had never even been on a vacation, much less a six-week tour of Europe, and then she'd say, Honey, why not put down that boring report on how much your international chain of barbershops earned us this month and join me in the bedroom so I can show you how grateful I am, and in the bedroom she'd start stripping, and was good at it, not that she'd ever done it before, no, she hadn't, she was just naturally good at it, and when she was done there she was, with her perfect face and the Daisy Mae body, smiling at him with unconditional love.

It wouldn't be easy. It would take hard work. He knew a little about hard work, having made a barbershop out of a former pet store. Tearing out a counter, he'd found a dead mouse. From a sump pump he'd pulled three hardened snakes. But he'd never quit. Because he was a worker. He wasn't afraid of hard work. Was she a worker? He didn't know. He'd have to find out.

They'd find out together.

She stood beside his wooden bench, under his shop awning, and the shadow of her wild mane fell at his feet.

What a wild ride this had been, how much he had learned about himself already!

"Here I am," she said, with a shy, pretty smile.

"I'm so glad you are," he said, and bent to unlock the door of the shop. ♦

THE CLOUDED CRYSTAL BALL

[Andrew Sullivan in the
October, 1988, issue of *Spy*]

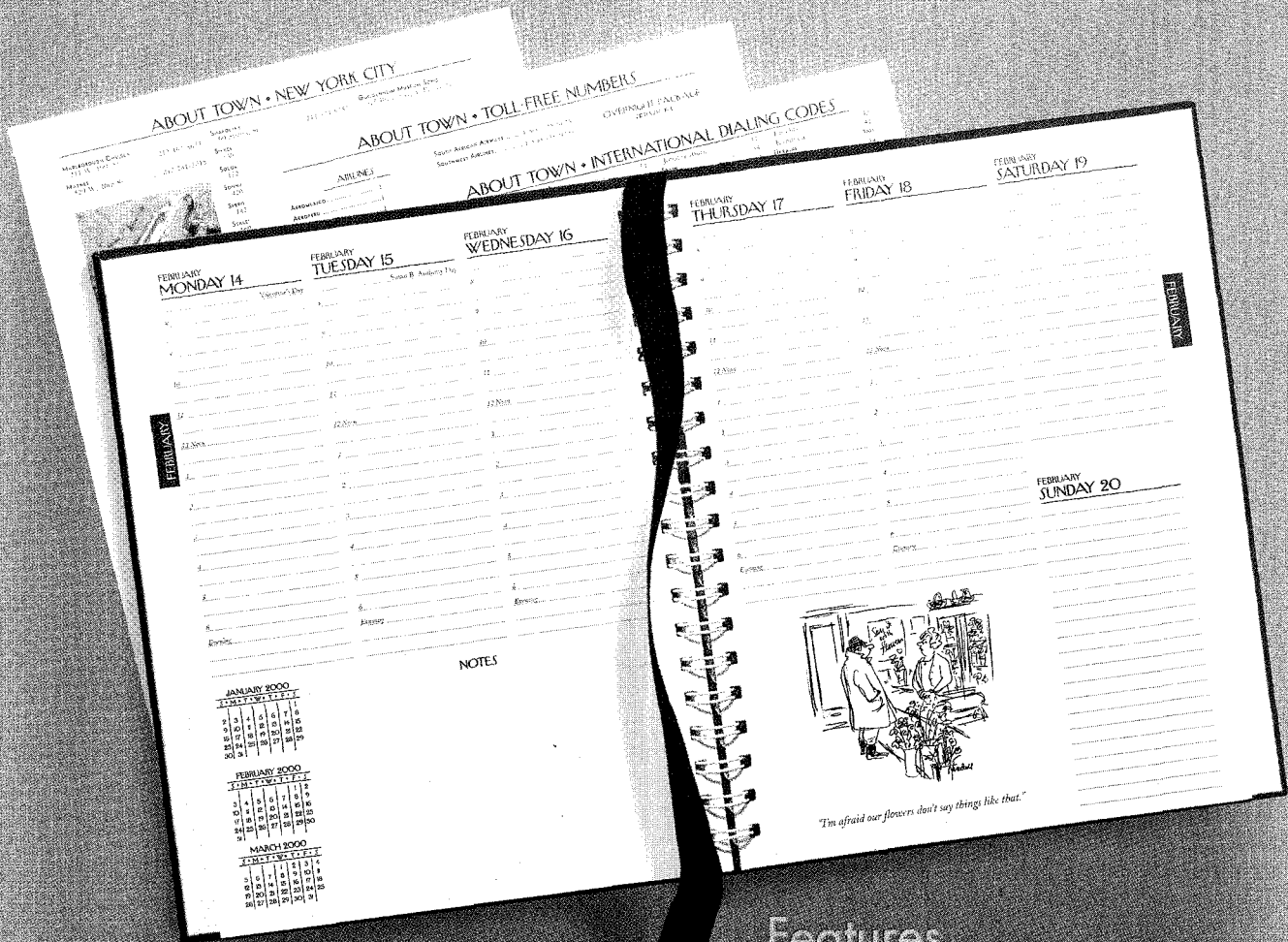
Even the most impressive Rhodes scholar senator, New Jersey's Bill Bradley, has shown the classic Rhodie touch in ducking calls to run for Congress in 1974 and for the presidency this year.

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THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE LAST EMPEROR

Richard Strauss, for better or for worse, is the composer of the century.

BY ALEX ROSS

ON May 16, 1906, in the Austrian city of Graz, the curtain went up on modern music. Richard Strauss conducted his opera "Salome," a shockingly faithful adaptation of a play by Oscar Wilde. The piece had first been heard in Dresden, five months before, but it was the Graz performance that amazed the musical élite. Gustav Mahler, the director of the Court Opera in Vienna, attended with his wife, having been thwarted by imperial censors in his attempts to stage "Salome" himself. Giacomo Puccini made a special trip to see what his German rival was up to. Arnold Schoenberg brought along his pupil Alban Berg. Strauss took particular note of the crowd's demographics; he mentioned, in a letter to his wife, Pauline, the "young people from Vienna, with only the vocal score as hand luggage." Strange to say, one of them was an Austrian teen-ager named Adolf Hitler, who had just seen Mahler conduct "Tristan und Isolde" in Vienna. No less strange, there was a fictional character in attendance—Adrian Leverkühn, the antihero of Thomas Mann's "Doktor Faustus," a tale of a cold-hearted German composer in league with the Devil.

You won't find "Salome" highlighted in most histories of modern music. The première of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," in Paris, in 1913, is more often cited as the century's revolutionary moment. But "Salome" came first, and it killed the

nineteenth century, as T. S. Eliot wrote of "Ulysses." The first notes—a slithering scale on the clarinet—expose a crack in the musical order. The scale begins in C-sharp, wanders into G, a key that is entirely alien to C-sharp, and then returns to the original C-sharp, as if nothing had happened. The score is full of irrational chord changes, which function like quick cuts in film. The cinematic effects redouble with the entrance of Herod, Salome's degenerate stepfather. He comes out on the terrace; looks for Salome; gazes at the moon, which he describes as "reeling through the clouds like a drunken woman"; orders wine, slips in blood, stumbles over the body of a soldier who has committed suicide; feels cold, feels a wind—there is a hallucination of wings beating the air. It's quiet again; then more wind, more visions. The orchestra plays broken waltzes, expressionistic clusters of dissonance, impressionistic washes of timbre. Later, when the soldiers prepare to sever John the Baptist's head, the bottom drops out altogether: rumblings and strangled cries build into a gigantic smear of sound which saturates the spectrum of the twelve-tone scale. As Salome admires the head, the harmony steadies itself, settling on a disturbingly radiant C-sharp. Yet, at the moment of ultimate bliss, Strauss undermines a conventional major-key progression by sliding an alternative progression beneath it. A night-

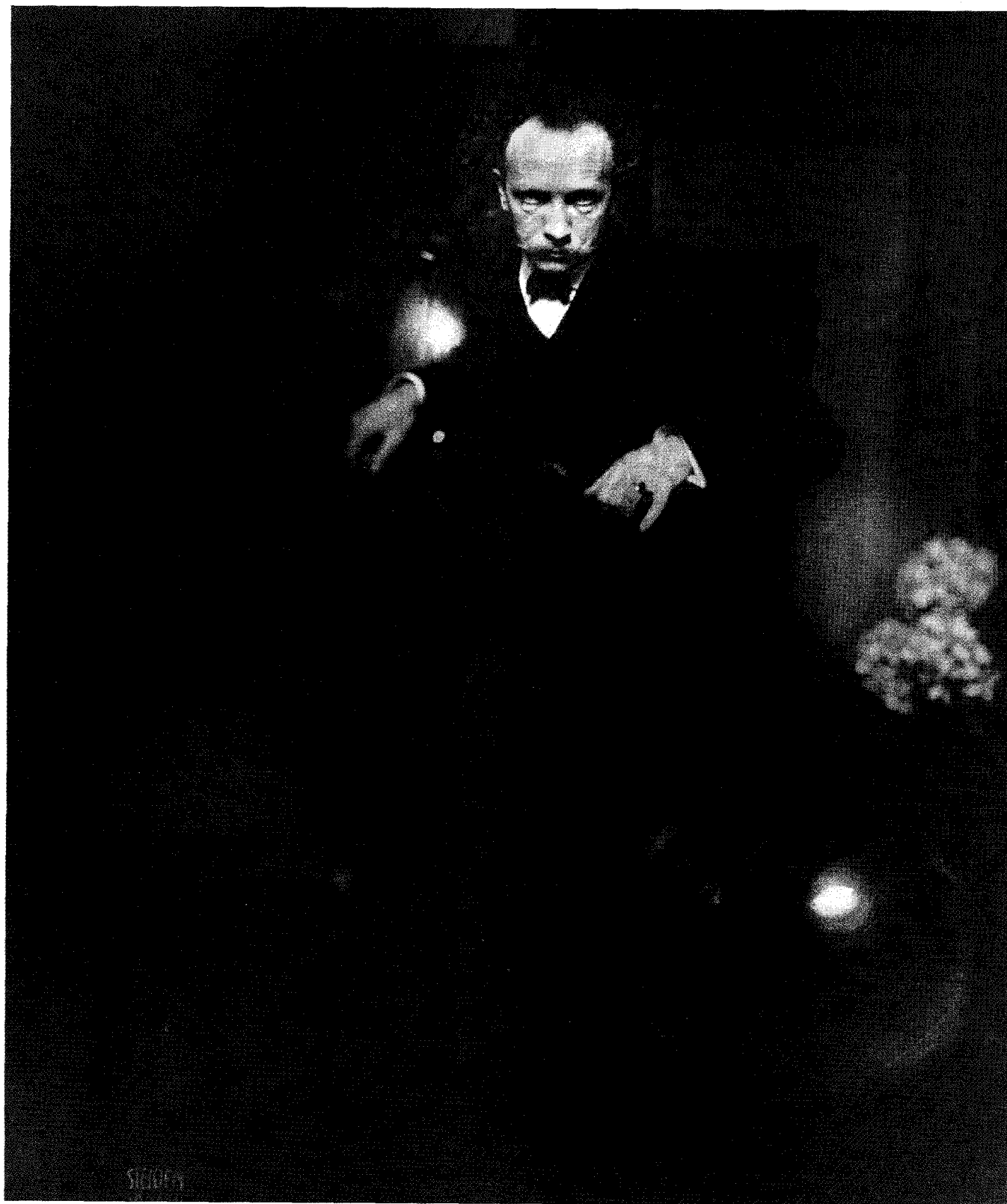
mare dissonance results—a mixture of the ordinary and the unspeakable. It's like seeing an evil face in a crowded room. Herod, disgusted by the spectacle that his own incestuous lust has incubated, calls for Salome's death. The opera ends with nine bars of noise.

The morning after the Graz performance, Strauss was pleased with himself. "It is raining," he wrote to Pauline, "and I am sitting on the garden terrace of my hotel, in order to report to you that 'Salome' went well, gigantic success, people applauding for ten minutes until the fire curtain came down, etc., etc." The note of complacency in that "etc., etc." was ill-advised. Strauss would not occupy the vanguard of notoriety for much longer. After the worldwide sensation, in 1911, of "Der Rosenkavalier"—a score as gracious as "Salome" was vicious—he found himself trailing in the dust of rapid historical developments. That gathering of musical celebrities in Graz was like the last meeting of the crowned heads of Europe. Mahler died in 1911, and he seemed to take Romanticism with him. Puccini's "Turandot," which the composer left unfinished at his death, in 1924, ended an operatic succession that had begun in Florence at the end of the sixteenth century. Schoenberg abandoned tonality in 1908, and so began the age of "new music," with its long manifestos and tiny audiences.

Strauss himself had an uneven, serpentine career after his glory years, which had begun in 1889, with the libidinous tone poem "Don Juan." He became, among the young moderns, uncool. They hailed, as the landmarks of the new, not "Salome" and its dissonant companion "Elektra" but "The Rite of Spring," Schoenberg's Second String Quartet, and Berg's "Wozzeck." By the time of Strauss's death, in 1949, he had become a relic from a time capsule. When he was born, Germany had not yet been unified; absurdly, he was still alive as Germany split into West and East. Stravinsky, the high priest of the modern, supplied what seemed like the definitive epitaph. In his conversations with Robert Craft, he said, "I would like to admit all Strauss's operas to whichever purgatory punishes triumphant vulgarity. Their musical substance is cheap and poor; it cannot interest a musician today."

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Strauss, photographed by Edward Steichen in 1904: Fifty years after his death, his music sounds radical again.



There you had it. Today, fifty years after his death, Strauss occupies a far different historical position. In a century dominated by schools, systems, and other group activities—atonality, twelve-tone composition, futurism, objectivism, neoclassicism, total serialism, timbralism, neo-romanticism, post-

modernism—Strauss was an exuberant free agent. He lived in the here-and-now, writing swiftly and viscerally, in response to whatever subject seized his interest. His music still sounds mysteriously fresh. Many younger composers envy his spirited use and abuse of tonality, his way of electrifying the familiar.

His tone poems may not be as popular as they once were—encrustations of orchestral routine have blunted their satiric edge—but his operas are enjoying a long-term renaissance. Lauren Flanagan triumphed last season at New York City Opera in “Intermezzo,” Strauss’s dazzling marital comedy from the twen-

ties; Renée Fleming is poised to breathe new life into "Rosenkavalier" at the Met; the Danish soprano Inga Nielsen wickedly reinterprets the title role of "Salome" on a Chandos recording. Meanwhile, academics no longer dismiss Strauss as a second-class topic. They are discovering in him layer upon layer of irony and complexity.

Strauss obtained his independence at a price. He was proud, and he got his comeuppance when the Nazis came to power. After accepting praise and honors from the Third Reich, he was forced to endure a series of humiliations. He lent his prestige to Hitler and did not get it back. Yet he somehow went on singing the song of himself—more gently, more wistfully. In old age, oblivious of the fact that he had become irrelevant, Strauss wrote a series of sublimely unhistorical farewells: the operas "Daphne" and "Capriccio," "Metamorphosen" for strings, and the "Four Last Songs." These were so potent as to render the idea of relevance irrelevant. They destroyed, single-handedly, the modernist imperative of progress—the notion that music must always be made new. Strauss, in fact, had gone neither forward nor backward; he was using the same extended tonal language that he had used forty years before. A progressive had become a reactionary by standing absolutely still. The world had left

him behind, but over the next fifty years it would move back his way, making him sound radical again. Stravinsky would be crestfallen: Strauss is more than ever with us, a perverse hero for a perverse century.

HE did not look like a great composer. You have to wonder, as Roman Rolland wrote, "how *that* can have come from *this*"—how the music could have come from the man. To many of his contemporaries, he had the appearance of a boorish millionaire, a hick made good. Strauss was born in 1864 in Munich, a lazy Southern place in the eyes of other Germans. His father was a virtuoso horn player of lowly origins, his mother a brewery heiress. He was a worldly, well-to-do man who seemed to care more about the card game that followed the performance than about the performance itself. He composed for a few hours a day, in whatever mood; he could write at a cocktail party or in a railway car. He did not believe in God, and he saw no spiritual dimension in his art. He thought that every work had to have at least one tuneful, kitschy moment to please the dumbest members of the audience. Some of his commercial innovations were almost visionary: like a Bavarian Michael Ovitiz, he forced opera companies to accept package deals of his works, so that a popular new opera like "Rosenkavalier" would

have to be accompanied by the less popular "Feuersnot."

How do you write about such an unromantic cipher? Until this year, no thorough, full-length biography of Strauss was available in English. The fiftieth anniversary of his death, however, has brought two big new biographies, by the English critics Michael Kennedy and Matthew Boyden. How troublesome the case of Strauss remains can be seen in the fact that these books describe two entirely different people. Kennedy's "Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma" (Cambridge) gives us a reserved, self-deprecating, affably mysterious figure—an oddball bourgeois who might have drifted out of Mann's ironical self-portraits. Boyden's "Richard Strauss" (Northeastern) gives us a cold, greedy, hateful monster.

If you read the two new biographies back to back and make no attempt to resolve the contradictions that appear between them, you may begin to grasp the complexity of Strauss's character. Neither book will do on its own. Kennedy's is too apologetic on the matter of Strauss's involvement with the Nazis. He is mistaken when he says that anti-Semitism is never to be found in Strauss's correspondence: the early letters are rife with anti-Jewish slurs. Also, he makes Strauss's Nazi years look rosier by omitting several dismaying episodes. You would not know from him, for example, that the gala concert that Strauss conducted at the 1938 Reich Music Festival was attached to the Propaganda Ministry's exhibition of "Degenerate Music." Still, this book is earnest and effective in its campaign to arouse sympathy for Strauss. The anecdotes are charming, the musical descriptions evocative.

Where Kennedy covers up, Boyden goes on the attack. Unfortunately, his biography is a botch. There is a case against Strauss to be made, but Boyden does it neither competently nor honestly. He paraphrases other Strauss scholars without acknowledgment, and sometimes lifts from them directly. For example, he telescopes an essay by Timothy Jackson, on "Metamorphosen," into three paragraphs. Jackson writes, "Goethe's view of metamorphosis, like the classical notion, is essentially optimistic." Boyden writes, "Goethe took an essentially optimistic view of the idea of



"Do you have any idea who it is you're talking to?"

transformation." Jackson's name does not appear in the notes. The chapter on "Salome" replicates—page by page, argument by argument, quotation by quotation—an essay on the opera by Sander Gilman. (Gilman: "[Strauss] brings the 'howling' cacophony of the orchestra to its peak when the first and second soldiers use the words 'howling' and 'Jews.'" Boyden: "The cacophony reaches its peak when the first and second soldiers intone the words 'howling' and 'Jews.'")

Boyden makes tendentious errors throughout. He claims that Strauss wrote his "Festival Prelude" for the Reich Festival of 1938, when it was actually written in 1913. He reports as fact a rumored breakfast with Hitler which, according to the Strauss scholar Bryan Gilliam, never took place.

Worst of all, Boyden delivers an astonishing insult to Strauss's daughter-in-law, the late Alice Strauss, whose Jewishness was well known to the Nazis. Boyden is anxious to minimize the potential threat to Strauss's family, so he calls Alice, variously, "the daughter of a half-Jewish industrialist," "quarter-Jewish," or just "Jewish"—in sneering scare quotes. He implies, in other words, that her mother was not Jewish at all. Why, then, do we later read that Alice's maternal grandmother died in the Nazis' show camp of Theresienstadt? "A total of twenty-six of [Alice's] relatives," Boyden reports, "were murdered in the name of the racial purification that Strauss believed central to the deliverance of German culture." There is no evidence that Strauss believed any such thing. And it seems not to have occurred to Boyden that a death toll of twenty-six is unusually high for the family of a quarter-Jew, or a quote-unquote Jew, or whatever he wishes to call her.

It's not news that a lot of bad books are being published these days. And, for decades, musical biographies have fallen below the standards that apply to historical or literary ones. Even so, Boyden's and Kennedy's books suffer from the basic Straussian problem: people have a devil of a time squaring the life with the work. Two shorter biographies, fortunately, do a better job. Tim Ashley, in a new volume in Phaidon Press's 20th-Century Composers series, gives an exactly fair account of the historical record. And Bryan Gilliam's "The

Life of Richard Strauss" (Cambridge) supplies a rich, open-ended discussion of Strauss's intellectual background and musical personality. "If there is a significant consistency to be found in Strauss's compositional output," Gilliam writes, "it is in his desire to suggest the profundities and ambiguities to be found in everyday life, even in the apparently banal." Strauss weaves together "the cheap and the precious, the commonplace and the sublime. . . . The key may not be to reconcile or resolve such contradictions, but rather to look at them in a dialectical way." In

other words, Gilliam asks that we listen to Strauss's music as if it were the result of a conscious plan. Oddly, this hasn't been done before. The music has almost always been treated as an eruption of craftsmanship in the service of no particular creative idea.

THE personality that Strauss presents in music is not the remote, saturnine one we find in letters and memoirs. It is brash, passionate, fearful, wistful, sardonic, spiteful, and a bit deranged. The voice is recognizable in just a few bars of any piece of his that you might hear on the radio. It insists in almost childish fashion on the basic building blocks of music, on major and minor triads. But as the triads ricochet against each other in unexpected ways they break free of the step-by-step progressions of the harmony books. Triads collide across the distance of a tritone—e.g., C major and F-sharp. The music often seems to be in two keys at once; progressions from the C-major realm may be interlaced with progressions from the F-sharp one, in a dizzying chain of harmonic non sequiturs, or chords from parallel realms may pile up into bracing bitonal dissonances.

Strauss's musical personality also gives itself away in its endlessly inventive handling of the orchestra. Even those who detest Strauss have to concede that he was one of the most original orchestrators in history. Instruments snarl, wail, growl, and shriek at the extreme upper or lower ends of their ranges, making noise as well as music. And, despite the heaviness of the apparatus, the Straussian orchestra is light on its feet—it is always skittering from



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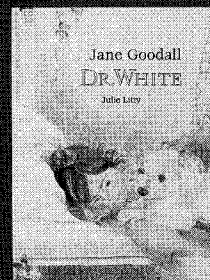
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one short episode to the next. It is, more often than not, a vehicle of wit, even when the subject matter is deadly serious. Strauss the composer was a prankster, an ironist, even an anarchist.

I don't use the word "anarchist" casually. None of the new books on Strauss—not even Gilliam's—show the full intellectual chaos that lay behind the bourgeois façade. To see its origins, one has to delve into one of his most obscure works—his first, failed opera, "Guntram." Completed in 1893, this was the work with which Strauss positioned himself as the potential successor to Wagner; he had already made his name as a brilliant writer for orchestra, but he must have sensed that his untidy talent was best suited for the stage. "Guntram," for which Strauss wrote his own libretto, was, as one of his mentors lamented, Wagnerian in technique but anti-Wagnerian in content. The plot is worth a brief summary. Guntram, a medieval troubadour, falls in love with a woman who is being brutalized by her husband. Guntram kills the husband in an act of self-defense and is nonetheless put on trial by the shadowy singing society to which he belongs. But Guntram refuses to submit to an outside judgment. He leaves the order, leaves his beloved, walks away from the world. To understand why this scenario upset the Bayreuth circle, imagine Parsifal getting fed up with the Knights of the Grail and abandoning them to their own devices, or Brünnhilde throwing Siegfried on the funeral pyre and washing her hands of the whole business. The critic Arthur Seidl, who was friendly with Strauss, stated in a review that the opera was an allegory of Strauss's ambivalence toward the Wagnerians, and that the ending symbolized his break from them.

"Guntram" is a flawed opera, but the finale is a wonder: voice and orchestra trace irregular, ethereal melodic arcs that are characteristic of Strauss's mature style. Decades later, Strauss acknowledged that Seidl's analysis was correct—that this was his "renunciation of community," his rejection of the Bayreuth cult. And it was more: it trumpeted the radical individualist philosophy of Max Stirner, an early-nineteenth-century philosopher who influenced Nietzsche. In his book "The Ego and Its Own" Stirner argues that all forms of organized religion, as well as all organized

societies, imprison individuals within illusions of morality, duty, and law. The individual, the egoist, has every right to resist those illusions and live life as he pleases. Strauss became interested in this unashamedly thuggish philosophy in 1892, while he was finishing the "Guntram" libretto, and, according to Seidl, he was still talking over Stirner's ideas on the afternoon of the opera's premiere. If you look at "The Ego and Its Own" and "Guntram" side by side, you see some arresting similarities. Stirner attacks the "beautiful dream" of social duty; Guntram echoes that phrase and adds, contemptuously, "Dream on, good people, about the salvation of humanity." Stirner faults Socrates for submitting to the laws of the community rather than passing judgment on himself; Guntram, in line with Stirner's thinking, becomes his own judge and declares, "The laws of my mind determine my life."

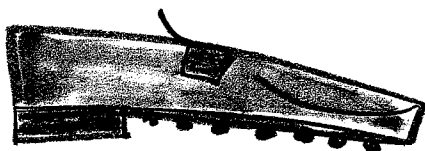
FOR an allegedly bourgeois composer, Strauss had eyebrow-raising literary tastes. He wrote songs on texts by Richard Dehmel, a Nietzschean poet infamous for his erotic hallucinations; Oskar Panizza, who was jailed for "crimes against religion, committed through the press" (Panizza once described "Parsifal," not inaptly, as "spiritual fodder for pederasts"); and John Henry Mackay, Max Stirner's biographer, who later, under the pen name Sagitta, wrote novels celebrating man-boy love. For his second opera, "Feuersnot," Strauss asked the Berlin satirist Ernst von Wolzogen to adapt an obscene Flemish legend about a woman who sets fire to a city by emitting flames from her buttocks. The translation of Wilde's "Salome" that Strauss used for his opera was made by Hedwig Lachmann, the wife of the anarchist philosopher Gustav Landauer, who would later become Commissar for Education and Enlightenment of the short-lived Soviet Republic in Bavaria. (By a quirk of cultural history, Lachmann and Landauer were the grandparents of the director Mike Nichols.) It was no surprise that Strauss came to be seen as an

exemplary decadent. A physician wrote to the *New York Times* in 1907, "'Salome' is a detailed and explicit exposition of the most horrible, disgusting, revolting and unmentionable features of degeneracy that I have ever heard, read of, or imagined."

Strauss himself did not share the radical tendencies of certain of his collaborators, although his rugged setting of "The Stonebreaker's Song," a proletarian poem by Karl Henckell, anticipates Weill's settings of Brecht twenty years later. What Strauss really wanted was all-around outrage. He was accused of putting on sensations in order to increase box-office receipts, but his purposes went deeper: he had a simmering contempt for authority and for the pomposity that attended it. Several of his tone poems begin with grand heroic statements and then dwindle toward silence. "Don Juan," "Till Eulenspiegel," and "Don Quixote" all end with the sudden death of the central figure. "Ein Heldenleben" closes on a note of resignation. "Also Sprach Zarathustra," whose mind-blowing fanfare is always quoted out of context in films and on TV, spirals downward into shudders of disgust and a miasma of unresolved harmony.

Indeed, scholars who have lately studied the programs behind the tone poems suspect that Strauss treated the whole symphonic ideal—the romantic striving after transcendence—as an ironic exercise. James Hepokoski describes "Zarathustra" as a "chain of free, self-contained sections that lead into successive 'blind alleys.'" Strauss himself pictured "Don Quixote" as "a variation form ad absurdum," and he sarcastically called "Ein Heldenleben" ("A Hero's Life") a contemporary update of Beethoven's "Eroica," with extra horns and no funeral march. In the screechily dissonant section entitled "The Hero's Enemies," he transcribes the horrible noises that critics perceived in his works—a kind of satire of modernism, before the fact. There are moments when Strauss's music implodes on itself.

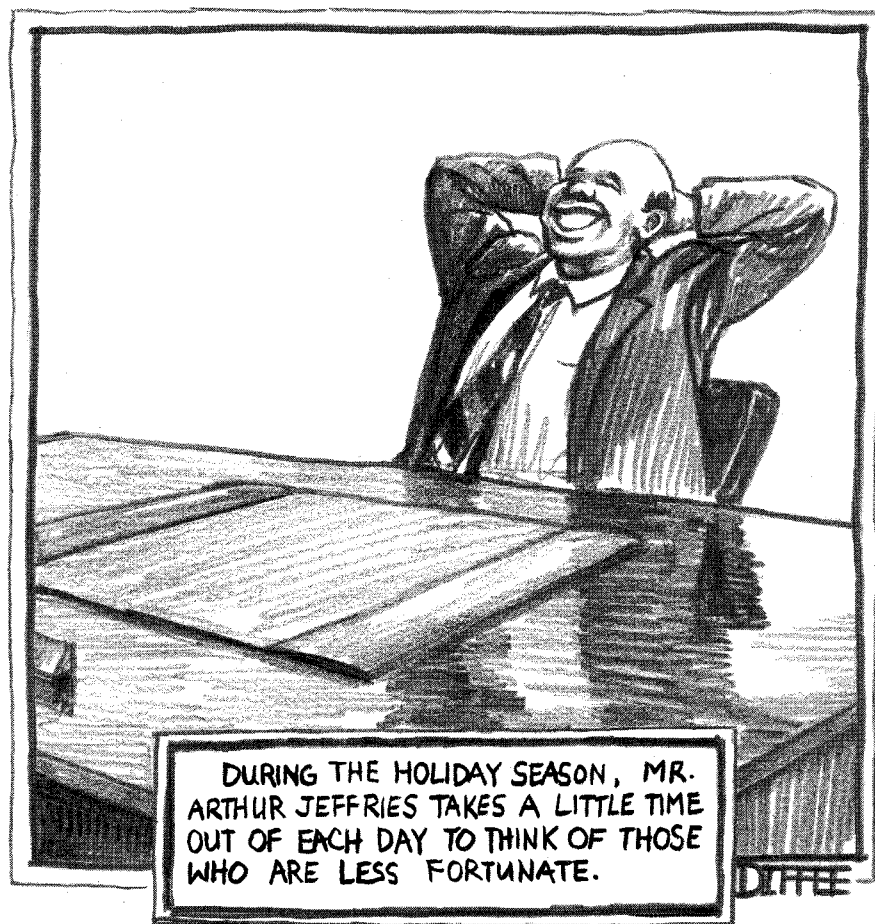
Compare Strauss in this respect to Mahler, whom he called his "antipode," his friendly rival. Mahler hungered for transcendence and remained the more faithful Wagnerian. Mahler was also attracted to the Christian promise of redemption, which did not interest



Strauss. "I don't know what I'm supposed to be redeemed from," he once said. Yet he threw his reputation behind Mahler's symphonies, overlooking his friend's attacks of jealousy. (Mahler is often quoted as having said, "My time will come." What he actually said was "My time will come when his is up"—the "he" being Strauss.) Mahler was the poet of power, of epiphany, of self-transformation. Strauss became the poet of self-disempowerment. He, too, enjoyed displays of pomp, but he seldom let them prevail. Tim Ashley, in his biography, argues that the "Alpine Symphony," Strauss's last big work for orchestra, is a kind of ironic memorial to Mahler. Despite affectionate quotations from Mahler symphonies, the music sinks back, in a state of mental and physical fatigue, toward the vaporous cluster harmonies with which it began.

In short, this music is not free of nihilism. Outside the fabulous carnival of sound is a cold and empty space. You feel it when the midnight bell starts tolling in "Also Sprach Zarathustra," when the Marschallin, in "Rosenkavalier," is unsettled by the ticking of the clocks, when Salome gazes into the cistern where John the Baptist is about to be killed. "I hear nothing," Salome whispers, and the orchestra plays that sound.

Yet Strauss offers an enormous consolation in the warmth and strength of his lyric impulse. More often than not, the consoling voices in his operas are those of women. Perhaps the most surprising result of his lifelong contrarianism was his unstinting display of sympathy for his female characters. Some of this may be attributed to the influence of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, whose great sequence of Strauss librettos, from "Rosenkavalier" to "Arabella," fastidiously avoided the usual stereotypes. But the real explanation probably lies in the solidity of Strauss's marriage to the singer Pauline de Ahna, who affected contempt for her husband in public and showed an almost desperate devotion in private. Anyone who saw Lauren Flanagan's performance in "Intermezzo," at City Opera, can have no doubt of the intensity of Strauss's regard for Pauline: in that scrupulously autobiographical opera, the dynamic wife commands center stage while the phleg-



matic husband putters in the background.

Strauss's operas are, in their old-fashioned way, proto-feminist documents. In them, it is usually the woman who actively desires, and the man who is passively perceived. Salome savors the body of John the Baptist; the Marschallin enjoys and then lets go of the boy Octavian; Zerbinetta, in the first version of "Ariadne auf Naxos," says that the young god Bacchus has "cheeks like a woman's, eyes like a deer's"; the Countess, in "Capriccio," receives the advances of two men, the Poet and the Composer, and can't decide between them. Renée Fleming, who has a staggeringly beautiful new record entitled "Strauss Heroines," says, in an interview included with the disk, "It amazes me that the monologue in Act I—the Marschallin's meditation on lost youth in "Rosenkavalier"—"was written by a man." In contrast, Strauss's male characters tend to be flighty, vicious, or obtuse. In "Salome," masculinity falls to pieces in the figure of Herod—that male hysteric who hypocritically surrounds himself with contentious Jewish

and Christian theologians and pauses in his lust for his teen-age stepdaughter only to comment on the beauty of a dead soldier.

AFTER the turn of the century, when Strauss began to write prolifically for female opera singers, his outlook brightened. He rhapsodized more and mocked less. His irony became wistful in "Rosenkavalier," with its boozy waltzes, and positively lighthearted in "Ariadne auf Naxos," with its pseudo-authentic chamber orchestra and free-wheeling play of styles. By the twenties, he even fancied himself, mistakenly, an operetta composer—"the Offenbach of the twentieth century." In the thirties, he worked out his "late style," in which tonality becomes evanescent, mercurial. No convincing account exists of what is really going on in pieces like "Daphne," "Capriccio," and "Metamorphosen"; contemporary harmonic analysis, which pushes past the surface of music in search of roots, can't seem to cope with Strauss, for whom surface play is everything. It's hard to tell what foundation

the music really rests on: the root harmonies, underneath the wild chord changes, are either banal or nonexistent. Glenn Gould, an eloquent Strauss enthusiast, furnished one of the best descriptions of the composer's fairly indescribable method. "Through all of Strauss's works," Gould wrote, "there runs one prevalent ambition, the desire to find new ways in which the vocabulary of key-signature tonality can be augmented without at the same time being allowed to deteriorate into a state of chromatic immobility." There's the crux: Strauss rearranges the major-and-minor-key system without dismantling it altogether. When he does make his way back to conventional harmony, he often gives it a not quite believable air. "Rosenkavalier," a riot of weird, wonderful modulations, ends with an emphatic textbook cadence, but the put-on artlessness of it is guaranteed to make you smile.

Nearly every twentieth-century musical history you can find will state something to the effect that Strauss "flirted" with atonality in "Salome" and "Elektra" and then "retreated" to tonality. In the eyes of certain critics, Strauss was guilty of feminine weaknesses: stylistically, he was thought to be capricious and superficial, and several times he was called womanly in print. But the famous flirtation with atonality was a mirage—a distortion on the lens of modernist criticism. "Salome" and "Elektra" seem to turn toward atonality only because atonal composers copied them. Schoenberg's "emancipation of the dissonance" was, in part, an excision of Straussian dissonances from their surrounding chordal patterns. When Schoenberg and Berg heard "Salome" in Graz, they were listening closely. (Berg heard the opera six more times the following year in Vienna, and his debt would become clear in "Wozzeck." That work's sinister "primary" chord, which is generated from a modified whole-tone scale, is essentially identical to the motif of Salome's madness.) The vituperation that Schoenberg and his followers heaped on Strauss displays something of the anxiety of influence: Strauss had to be knocked down because he had given them too

much. The same anxiety may color Stravinsky's invective. It is telling that Stravinsky was particularly incensed by "Ariadne auf Naxos," whose neo-Baroque manner predates his own efforts in that line.

What irritates the modernist sensibility is Strauss's love of disorder, his horror of clean forms. Those who accepted Adolf Loos's condemnation of ornament as crime sentenced Strauss to death. True, his works contain awesome lapses of taste—usually in the latter half of a piece, and usually in a bland major key. Yet what is bad in Strauss cannot be separated from what is human in him. In a century overpopulated by "the lunatics of one idea," as Wallace Stevens put it, Strauss

is majestically messy and down to earth. At the end of his life, he said, "I may not be a first-rate composer, but I am a first-class second-rate composer." He was probably right. Then again I have a hard time thinking of composers of the last hundred years who rose any higher. Should I consider Schoenberg first-rate when his music never makes me smile? Should I venerate Stravinsky when his music never makes me cry? Perhaps all major twentieth-century composers have been a shade second-rate. They have lacked the unself-conscious assurance of the older masters. There is no longer a climate in which such assurance could grow: the music-mad culture that produced Mozart and Beethoven is unthinkable. Around the time of that shattering performance of "Salome" in Graz, the audience began to split apart. Composers were no longer addressing humanity; they were writing for a subculture. Strauss was among the first to see it happening. He may even have thought about it on the morning after "Salome" as the rain pattered on the terrace and he remembered the young men who called themselves his admirers.

WHEN Strauss met Hitler, at the Bayreuth Festival in 1933, he was in a position of weakness. It had been twenty years since the runaway success of "Rosenkavalier," and his ego had begun to fail him. Hitler drew him in by promising to enact various

pet Straussian reforms. New royalty schemes would reward classical composers over popular ones; composers' copyrights would be extended; spa orchestras would be prevented from murdering Wagner overtures; youths would not ruin their voices by yelling patriotic songs. These were the changes that the blinkered, self-involved Strauss wanted from the new world order. He became president of the Reich Music Chamber and proceeded to run it in a haphazard fashion. As erratic as ever, he veered this way and that, showing defiance one day and craven obedience the next. After he was forced to resign his official position, in 1935, he wrote, in a private document, "I consider the Streicher-Goebbels Jew baiting... the basest weapon of untalented, lazy mediocrity against a higher intelligence and greater talent." A few days later, he hailed Hitler as "the great architect of German social life." He never formulated a coherent response to what was happening around him. "Strauss acts like a completely detached bystander," one Nazi operative complained. The émigrés, who wanted him to renounce the regime, said the same thing.

During prior spells of German aggression, Strauss had kept himself more or less aloof. In the First World War, he had failed to contribute to the war effort and had worked chiefly on "Die Frau ohne Schatten," the sprawling fairy-tale opera that he and Hofmannsthal intended as their masterpiece. "It is sickening to read in the papers about the regeneration of German art," he wrote to Hofmannsthal, "or to read how Young Germany is to emerge cleansed and purified from this 'glorious' war, when in fact one must be thankful if the poor blighters are at least cleansed of their lice and bed-bugs and cured of their infections and once more weaned from murder!" He seemed almost to be attacking Thomas Mann, who, in his conservative phase, had celebrated the war as "cleansing," as "festive." Come 1933 and it was Strauss who was attaching his name to chauvinist pamphlets, one of them an attack on Thomas Mann. What had happened to the proud anarchist? He had met, it turned out, his spiritual match. Hitler presented himself not as a dictator but as a music lover, flattering Strauss with his knowledge of musical matters and his



boyhood interest in "Salome." Nazism was a fly trap for aesthetes of Strauss's type: no matter how refined their tastes, they disappeared without a trace into the general aesthetic of kitsch and crime.

Strauss liked to believe that as an artist he remained a law unto himself. "Guntram," again, was the key to his thinking. In it, a secret order of musicians sought to "improve mankind through art," in the composer's words. The composer himself sought something else. "Even though Wagner succeeded in the case of 'Parsifal,'" he wrote, "that does not mean to say that every other artistic undertaking which intends too strong an ethical tendency from the first does not already... contain the seeds of death in itself." Looking over the history of political art, one might be inclined to agree, and to make no exception for "Parsifal." Wagner thought that his operas would usher in a better world, and they might well have made the world better for individual listeners. But when one enthusiast tried to use Wagner as a social tool—"Out of 'Parsifal' I am building my religion," Hitler said—the ethical tendencies of the work began grinding in reverse. During the Nazi period, Strauss kept turning over in his mind the relationship of the artist to society. In a memoir, he paraphrased the plot of "Guntram" this way: "Guntram judges himself and abrogates the right of the group to punish him." In 1935, he wrote, in a letter to his librettist Stefan Zweig, "The 'Volk' exists for me only at the moment it becomes the audience." The Gestapo intercepted the letter, and Strauss's resignation from the Reich Music Chamber followed.

In 1936, Strauss set to work on the opera "Daphne," and once again he took up the theme of "renunciation of community." Daphne is a solitary nymph who feels a stronger connection to natural things than to human beings. Nonetheless, she falls in love with the human Leukippos and also draws the attention of the god Apollo. After Apollo kills Leukippos in a jealous rage, Daphne wishes only to stand by her lover's grave in sorrow, as a "symbol of never-ending love." The gods, taking pity, change her into a laurel tree that will stand on that spot. Strauss's orchestra depicts Daphne's transformation

in bright, quivering patterns, and her voice returns just before the end in wordless arabesques. Apollo is lost in wonder at the song: "Are we still gods, or were we overshadowed long ago by human emotion, obliterated long ago by such gentle greatness?" The metamorphosis of the lonely nymph feels like a metaphor for the artist renouncing the world, and the impression is strengthened by echoes of the music of "Guntram." Both works begin in G major and end in F-sharp/G-flat, and both have melodies that weave gently around a triad and quicken into downward-falling triplets. The endings, in particular, share an atmosphere of untouchable serenity. Strauss has rewritten his youthful Wagnerian showpiece—and much of Wagner, besides—as a happy-sad pastoral scene.

Strauss knew that he had created something glorious in the ending of "Daphne." In his last years, he played it over and over on the piano. What did he think it meant? Some scholars hear a kind of mute protest, the announcement of "inner emigration." They have also heard a hint of regret in the black-as-night string chords of "Metamorphosen," which Strauss wrote as a memorial to a ruined German culture at the end of the war. I've tried to hear those things, but I can't. Strauss could express profound sadness, but he was still too proud to show remorse. More likely, he thought of "Daphne" as the final, unfettered triumph of his individuality. But under Hitler the individual had been annihilated—he had been absorbed into the larger evil. Both "Daphne" and "Metamorphosen" are great music from a gray soul, pure music from an impure place. The only explanation for them is, perhaps, a mystical one. After decades of thrashing about, Strauss's separate creative personality had acquired not only a mind but also a soul of its own. Its powers of communication had reached some stage of critical mass. While the man himself sank into a fatalistic belief that Western culture had come to an end, his music was singing out with foolish love to an audience of the future.

IF, as Leonard Bernstein once said, Mahler is the prophet of a century of death, Strauss shows how a weakened, wounded, obdurately human art can sur-

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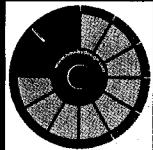
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vive the catastrophe. Music, he suggests, cannot mirror all the terrors of the age. It cannot even do them justice. Instead, it should do what it has always done—play upon the emotions and conjure emotions from notes. “The mystery of love,” Salome says, “is greater than the mystery of death.” The music of emotion

is greater than the music of disaster.

Strauss died on September 8, 1949. At his funeral, three singers sang the final trio from “Der Rosenkavalier.” Pauline Strauss reached out her arms and slid from her chair, her knees scraping the gravel. She cried, “Richard! Richard!” The coffin went into the ground. ♦

BOOKS

THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER

A new film, “The Talented Mr. Ripley,” revives the chilliest crime writer of them all.

BY SUSANNAH CLAPP



THE murder reflected in a pair of spectacles, the merry-go-round that whirls out of control, the hand waving through the grille of a drain.

Everyone who has seen the classic Hitchcock film of Patricia Highsmith’s “Strangers on a Train” can call up one of its disturbing images. The 1951 movie transformed the fortunes of a young writer, who was still in her twenties when the book—her first novel—was published. But Hitchcock, in bringing the story to the screen, neutered it. Highsmith’s novel puts forward an outrageous proposition—that a psychopath can persuade a clean-cut, law-abiding stranger that each of them should kill on behalf of the other. And it proceeds to prove that this is not only feasible but inevitable: both men go on to commit murder. In the Hitchcock version, however, only the psychopath kills. Memorable though the film is, it pulls back from the novel’s most disturbing implications to become, at bottom, another Hollywood good-guy, bad-guy story.

Filmmakers have always

been drawn to Highsmith’s novels, with their tightly wound plots about the normality of violence, their disquieting, myopic closeups (cigarette ash on a dinner plate, an angry pimple on a character’s face), and their deadpan style,

which invites a range of interpretations. Her 1954 novel “The Blunderer” was filmed, by Claude Autant-Lara, as “Le Meurtrier” in 1963. Claude Miller made “This Sweet Sickness” (1960) into “Dites-Lui Que Je L’Aime,” in 1977. The same year, Wim Wenders cast Dennis Hopper and Bruno Ganz in “The American Friend,” his version of “Ripley’s Game”—the third in a series of five novels featuring Highsmith’s most alluring sociopath, the American expatriate in Europe Tom Ripley. (The first three Ripley novels have just been published by Knopf’s Everyman’s Library in a handsome one-volume edition.)

Anthony Minghella’s forthcoming “The Talented Mr. Ripley” is the second screen adaptation of the 1955 novel that launched the Ripley series. Nearly forty years ago, René Clément had one of his biggest successes with “Plein Soleil” (the English title was “Purple Noon”), starring Alain Delon as Ripley. As Hitchcock had done with “Strangers,” Clément softened the story of a

young man—Ripley—who murders a friend in order to assume the victim’s identity. Rather than letting the urbane killer evade the law, as Highsmith had done, the French director ended the film with his imminent arrest. “I find the public passion for justice quite boring and artificial,” Highsmith once wrote, “for neither life nor nature cares if justice is ever done or not.” Early reports of “The Talented Mr. Ripley” indicate that Minghella, who directed “The English Patient,” has done some softening of his own, giving Ripley’s murder of his friend Dickie Greenleaf a conventional “psychological” motive—the crime is provoked by spurned homosexual advances. Even the best directors have quailed at the author’s audaciousness, her flouting of moral certainties, her lack of interest in psychological explanations.

Highsmith’s critical reputation has been ambiguous.



Highsmith: Graham Greene called her a “poet of apprehension.”

DAVID HUGHES

For years, she was corralled—as the distinguished British writer Ruth Rendell has often been—by book-review editors into the sort of “crime corner” slot that protects “literary” fiction from the perceived pollution of murder mysteries. But Highsmith’s novels constitute a genre of their own. Rather than engaging the reader with the solution to a crime or the thrill of a chase, they invite us to observe life as a cunningly devised trap from which there is, as events accumulate, no escape. (In the case of Ripley, the trap is that of a man who cannot escape the life of an escape artist.) A vicious act usually sets things in motion, but not always: there is no violence in one of Highsmith’s most harrowing novels, “Edith’s Diary” (1977), only the gradual suffocation of an individual’s spirit. Her subjects’ state of mind is afflicted by a kind of creeping airlessness. The same can be said of her prose, which registers every action—violent or not—in the same matter-of-fact way, so that the reader’s sense of perspective becomes that of a Seeing Eye dog.

Highsmith found her style early on, and stuck to it. She never made it onto lists of great contemporary women novelists, but she attracted some notable supporters. She rewrote “Strangers on a Train” at the Yaddo writers’ colony, thanks to a recommendation by Truman Capote. In gratitude to the place, she left Yaddo her entire estate, worth an estimated three million dollars, when she died, in 1995. Another Highsmith fan, Graham Greene, remarked in his introduction to her 1970 book “The Snail-Watcher and Other Stories” that “she has created a world of her own—a world claustrophobic and irrational which we enter each time with a sense of personal danger, with the head half turned over the shoulder.” More recently, the playwright David Hare observed, “I’ve always loved Patricia Highsmith’s work, because behind it lies the claim that, once you set your mind to it, any one human being can destroy any other.”

HIGHSMITH was born in 1921, in Fort Worth, Texas, but she lived most of her adult life in Europe—in Italy, in France, in England, and finally in Switzerland. She preferred living on her own, because, as she explained to

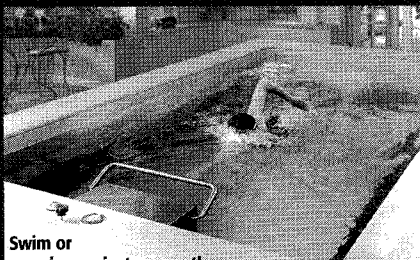
one interviewer, “My imagination functions better when I don’t have to speak to people.” Her father left home before her birth. “My mother, a commercial artist, had only one child, myself: we did not get along,” she said to a reporter for the *Village Voice*, a few months before her death. Her mother once told her that she had tried to abort her pregnancy by drinking turpentine, adding, in a black flash worthy of a Highsmith character, “It’s funny, you adore the smell of turpentine, Pat.”

She was taught to read at the age of two by her grandmother. When she was eight, after she had moved to New York with her mother and stepfather, she precociously discovered Karl Menninger’s “The Human Mind.” “He writes about pyromaniacs, kleptomaniacs, schizos and so on; their case histories, whether they’re cured or not,” she recalled. “I found this very interesting, and it was only much later that I realized that it had had such an effect on my imagination, because I started writing these weirdo stories when I was fifteen or sixteen.”

She wrote a story for her school magazine about a pyromaniacal nanny; it was rejected as being too unpleasant. She wrote another story, entitled “A Mighty Nice Man,” which was about a girl being enticed into a car by a stranger with a bag of sweets. Another tale concerned an adolescent who steals a library book; Highsmith had, she said, been on the point of stealing a book herself, but, realizing that the school librarian had her under surveillance, decided to convert the temptation into literature. She graduated from Barnard College, where she studied English composition, playwriting, and the short story—but not the novel. She had what she described as “tumultuous love affairs with men and women.” Until she was twenty-three, she was torn between a career in writing and a career as a painter. Throughout her life, she sketched—mostly cats and landscapes—and she told interviewers that she turned for stimulation to painters rather than to writers. She was particularly keen on the work of Francis Bacon: “It’s his emotion, the way he sees mankind throwing up into a toilet.”

When Highsmith was twenty-two, she began to write a book that, though

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never finished, was a template for her future stories. In it, a weedy, bright bore, who giggles a lot, hangs around a tough athlete who goes to school only to torment his fellow-pupils "with things like the bloated corpse of a drowned dog."

After Hitchcock bought the screen rights to "Strangers on a Train," Highsmith took her first trip to Europe. She decided that she found the Continent "more interesting than America," and she moved there in 1963. (In later years, she developed a correspondence with Gore Vidal, who described their exchanges as "the really irritable lamentations of two expatriates," founded on the "same dim view of America.") Her books were always more successful in Europe than in the United States. "Strangers on a Train" was turned down by six publishers before Harper & Brothers published the novel, in 1950. Even her Greenwich Village novel, "Found in the Street" (1986), sold scarcely four thousand copies in the States; in Germany, it sold forty thousand copies.

GRAHAM GREENE once described Highsmith as a "poet of apprehension." She could also be called a balladeer of stalking. The fixation of one person on another—oscillating between attraction and antagonism—

figures prominently in almost every Highsmith tale. At one extreme is the jilted lover in "This Sweet Sickness," who pursues a former girlfriend to the point of splitting himself in two—one identity for weekdays, another for weekends. One of them is responsible for the death of his love's new partner. Other Highsmith stalkers are more artfully devilish. The character of Bruno in "Strangers on a Train" may be physically drawn to the correct young man he meets on the train, but the homoerotic undercurrent, which is present in many of Highsmith's books, never rises to the surface. What thrills Bruno as he sets about intertwining his life with a stranger's is the notion of "a person exactly the opposite of you, like the unseen part of you, somewhere in the world, and he waits in ambush."

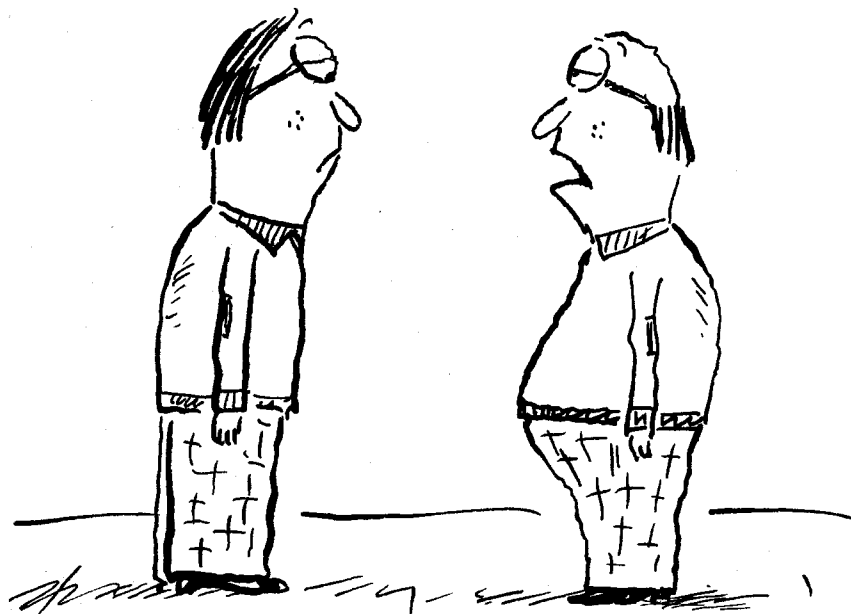
"The Blunderer," published six years after "Strangers on a Train," projects another piquant Highsmith conjunction: a man who has committed a crime but who feels that he has right on his side is shadowed by an innocent man who is racked by ill-founded remorse, as if the crime were also his. In a Highsmith novel, guilt can seem to leak from one cracked vessel to another.

The idea of the amoral opportunist Tom Ripley came to Highsmith when she saw a man in shorts walking on a beach at Positano, and wondered what

he was doing there, alone, at six o'clock in the morning. She began writing "The Talented Mr. Ripley" while she was living in a rented cottage near Lenox, Massachusetts. Her landlord was an undertaker, who was, she recalled, "very voluble about his profession." He wouldn't allow his tenant into his workplace, but he greatly interested her with accounts of his craft. One day, he explained that he was accustomed to making an incision in the chest of a corpse and stuffing it with sawdust. This led Highsmith to play, for a while, with the idea of putting Ripley on a train, escorting a cadaver stuffed with opium. Highsmith was always alert to the literary possibilities of events in her own life. After the suicide of an artist friend of hers, Allela Cornell, she took it upon herself to sell Cornell's paintings to various New York galleries, and was told that the galleries weren't "interested in dead artists." She later gave Ripley a lucrative profession—that of an art dealer who sells forgeries of a dead painter's work to suggest that the artist is still alive. The overlap between her own life and that of Ripley was most striking when she was working on the first Ripley novel and she started to feel that, as she put it, "Ripley was writing it and I was merely typing."

HIGHSMITH'S murderers are often individuals who make no distinction between people and things—indeed, who see people, in highly charged fashion, *as* things. Her fondness for reptilian imagery contributes to the settled menace of her prose. A scar moves "like a live worm." Rain falls with a sound that suggests a "snake crawling through the cement court below, slapping its moist coils against the walls." Here is a Highsmith character having lunch: "The peaches, like slimy little orange fishes, slithered over the edge of the spoon." Here is another character, imbibing a wholesome posset at bedtime: "The milk seemed to taste of bone and blood, of warm flesh, or hair."

Part of what makes this least febrile of writers insistently alarming is that her narratives suggest a seamlessness between bumbling normality and horrific acts; you never hear the gears shift when the terrible moment arrives. Many of her stories show the degenera-



SIPRESS

"I come from the future."

SOMEWHERE IN TRANSYLVANIA

(AFTER ILEANA MALANCIOIU)

Somewhere in Transylvania in an old church
I saw a saint who carried his skin on his back
But the skin had kept the shape of his body
Just as the saint had held on to his faith.

You could see this from his radiant forehead
And from the raw ribs that didn't seem to hurt
And from the way the skin, his facsimile,
Didn't look in the least lightweight.

Somewhere in Transylvania in an old church
I saw a single body that was prepared to die
He carried his soul on his back in his own skin
As though he were carrying a fortune.

—MICHAEL LONGLEY

tion of a principled person into a lethal one; in Highsmith, the corruption of good intentions is so insidious that it comes to seem a perfectly natural process.

Highsmith made a point of explaining that when she retyped her books "two-and-a-half times" on her manual typewriter it wasn't to polish her style; she did so in order to keep things tidy. "Style does not interest me in the least," she claimed. Her language is not self-consciously elegant. The syntax isn't supple. She isn't discursive or elaborate; she worked for a time writing plots for comic strips, and their pungency must have suited her. The level tread of her sentences is unnerving: "Mme. Annette came in with the bar cart. The silver ice bucket shone. The cart creaked slightly. Tom had been meaning to oil it for weeks." These staccato lines, from "Ripley's Game," might be taken to signal menace; in fact, nothing but guarded civility takes place. The following lines, from "The Talented Mr. Ripley," appear immediately after a murder: "He looked in the trouser pockets. French and Italian coins. He left them. He took a keychain with three keys."

HIGHSMITH showed little compunction about the casual dispatching of human beings in her books: she coolly remarked of Ripley, "He doesn't kill unless he has to." But she was more

fastidious when it came to animals. In a 1975 collection of stories, "The Animal-Lover's Book of Beastly Murder," various household pets wreak revenge on their owners—acts that are, on the whole, deemed to be entirely justified. One of her best non-Ripley books, "Deep Water" (1957), features an amateur snail collector, who likes to let his creatures crawl over his immaculate hands, which will eventually strangle his wife and dispatch his rivals. He watches his stately captives behaving like perfect specimens, out in their aquarium in the rain. Then, in a moment finely poised between the sinister and the silkenly beautiful, the creatures "slowly approached each other, lifted their heads, kissed, and glided on."

Highsmith advised any reader who felt that thrillers had lost their capacity to horrify to look in their cookbooks. She observed that, in the sections dealing with "our feathered and shelled friends, a housewife has to have a heart of stone to read these recipes." She once found one for terrapin stew, which prompted her to write a story about a young boy who thinks that his oppressive mother has brought him home a terrapin as a pet. She makes him watch as she boils it for dinner. The boy kills his mother.

Her 1972 novel, "A Dog's Ransom," begins with the disappearance of a pet and ends with a murder done by a cru-

sading cop. Discussing the book on a BBC television program, Highsmith referred with a quaint decorum to "two poodles whom I know. . . . I care very much about them." But she spoke with vehemence about her fictional villain: "I detest this kind of psychopath who would kidnap a dog. What is his life worth?" Animals brought out a sweetness in her that was often disguised by a brusque manner. The writer Francis Wyndham interviewed her several times, for radio and television, as well as in print. She was always almost paralyzed with shyness. But on two occasions a cat of Wyndham's unexpectedly popped into the room where they were talking, and Highsmith was immediately transformed, dropping down on all fours to speak to the animals.

IF any of her novels can be called "personal," it is her second one. The story of a love affair between two women, the book was first published, in 1952, as "The Price of Salt." Not wanting to be labelled a "lesbian-book writer," as she put it, Highsmith used the pseudonym "Claire Morgan," and received heaps of fan mail. She ascribed the novel's appeal to the glimmer of a happy ending. "Prior to this book," she wrote in her afterword to the British edition, which appeared in 1990, "homosexuals male and female in American novels have had to pay for their deviation by cutting their wrists, drowning themselves in a swimming pool, or by switching to heterosexuality." During a subsequent interview for British television, she was pressed to expand on the subject. She replied, "I don't answer personal questions about myself or other people. Any more than I give out people's telephone numbers."

When Highsmith died, four years ago, agents and publishers from all over the world attended her funeral, which was held in a village church near Locarno, Switzerland. Her British agent, Tanja Howarth, recalls that the event was marked by a Highsmithian moment. After the service, a rumbling noise was heard, and she realized for the first time that the churchyard was adjacent to a railway line. Looking up, she saw a passing locomotive, on which young people could be seen, waving from the windows. Strangers on a train. ♦

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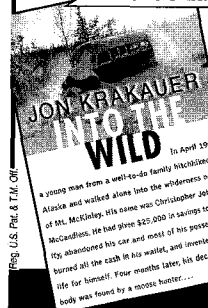
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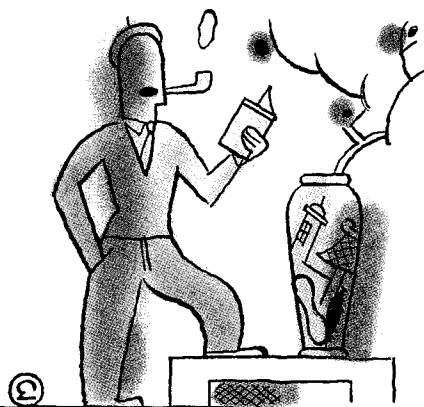
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BOOKS FROM OUR PAGES

REMBRANDT'S EYES, by Simon Schama (Knopf; \$50). In this large, handsome volume, Schama argues that Rembrandt's preoccupation with the true face of humanity, with all its blemishes, is what has always got him into trouble—and what made him a painter of genius. We see him scoring his first commissions in a crumbling Leiden studio and moving to Amsterdam to reinvent the genre of portraiture; completing his masterpiece "The Night Watch" while his young wife is dying in the next room; and spending himself into bankruptcy as he inaugurates, in his ever-loosening, disobedient brushwork ("exposing rather than concealing the painterly hand itself"), a revolution in painting that was two centuries ahead of its time.

THE ORCHID THIEF, by Susan Orlean (Random House; \$25). The author first met John Laroche in 1995, after he was arrested on the Fakahatchee Preserve for stealing wild orchids, which he planned to clone and sell. Not only would the enterprise be a lucrative one, Laroche argued, but commercial availability would discourage poaching of the same specimens. This account of Orlean's adventures with her slippery subject is at once a crash course in orchids, a meditation on the passions of collecting, and a valentine to the state of Florida, where the wild and the tame "are always in flux."

A GESTURE LIFE, by Chang-rae Lee (Riverhead; \$23.95). Franklin (Doc) Hata, the Korean owner of a medical-supply store in a Northeastern suburb, has worked hard to be a model American citizen, putting his traumatic experiences as a medic during the Second World War behind him. But he is plagued by the sense that his has been a life shaped by others' conventions, and one morning soon after his retirement he watches his house catch fire and does nothing to stop it. Lee's achievement lies in the subtlety of Hata's self-recovery.

MORE MATTER, by John Updike (Knopf; \$35). A dirigible of a book, huge but buoyant, this collection assembles the nonfiction written in the past eight years by a tireless virtuoso. Some graceful words on a favorite time of day? Magisterial reassessments of Lincoln, Wharton, Hawthorne? Wry, insightful essays on cartooning, dancing, tanning; on Helen Keller,

Lana Turner, Queen Elizabeth; on cars and Christmas cards? All present and accounted for. The matters under consideration, large and small, add up to a generous slice of intellectual autobiography—a picture of a mind as shrewd as it is capacious.

BLIND EYE, by James B. Stewart (Simon & Schuster; \$25). Part true crime, part exposé, this disturbing book follows the trail of Michael Swango, "the first alleged serial killer in this century to have emerged in the guise of a physician." The idea of a doctor at the bedside with a syringe full of poison is frightening enough, but Stewart's reporting also shows how the medical establishment closed ranks when suspicions were raised. "The loyalty among physicians," he writes, "makes police officers' famous 'blue wall of silence' seem porous by comparison."

NO ONE YOU KNOW, by Bruce Eric Kaplan (Simon & Schuster; \$13.95). Over the past decade, the cartoonist known by the collophonic signature "BEK" has been drawing a stark and emotionally wobbly world in which adults act like spoiled children and children emulate spoiled adults. In this debut roundup, "Where were you when I needed an imaginary friend?" and a crabby exec tells his hovering minions, "Damn it, agree to whatever she demands. No matter what it takes, I want my mommy."

CLOSE RANGE: WYOMING STORIES, by Annie Proulx (Scribner; \$25). Very little pays off for the ranchers and farmers who populate this uncompromising collection: if the rattlesnakes and the droughts and the neighbors don't get you, the bank and the developers are waiting their turn. In the end, only the harsh beauty of the landscape endures. Proulx's genius is to explore this losing proposition with such humor and imaginative force that it comes to seem closer to the truth of things than almost anything else.

THE RIVER SOUND, by W. S. Merwin (Knopf; \$23). In his lapping, unpunctuated lines, Merwin continues to capture the elemental rhythms of "wet bamboo clacking in the night rain" and "train windows with the days/slipping across them." In one poem, we meet him as the child who hid his boat under the bushes by a stream; providing an apt metaphor for his work, he informs us that "someone else took it and left me/instead the sound of the water."

MORGAN, by Jean Strouse (Random House; \$34.95). The author began researching this book, she says, with the usual prejudices against John Pierpont Morgan, the putative architect of "monopoly capitalism." But, after poring through overlooked and misinterpreted archival material, she arrived at a revisionist view, concluding, for instance, that "Morgan did not really believe in free markets." In the absence of a central bank, he exercised controls on business through his personal power. Strouse revises the picture of the private man, too: the homely robber baron turns out to have been a sensitive ladies' man who gave away or spent most of his fortune.

INTERPRETER OF MALADIES, by Jhumpa Lahiri (Mariner; \$12). A Bengali immigrant rents a room near M.I.T. and be-

EVER MEULEN

comes an unlikely confidant to his ancient landlady; a pair of newlyweds come to log-gerheads over the cache of Christian paraphernalia they uncover in their new home. In Lahiri's debut collection, these displaced Indian men and women—hardheaded and irresponsibly honest—learn to cope with the bewildering rituals of their new lives.

A PORTRAIT OF EGYPT, by Mary Anne Weaver (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$24). "The unexpected was always there, just around a corner or down an alleyway," Weaver writes, and every page here has its surprise: Egypt's besieged President, Hosni Mubarak, heads a government that is admirably secular, but its persecution of the Islamist opposition has created a human-rights nightmare; the Islamists, for the most part, aren't political terrorists but ordinary citizens who just want the government to stop jailing and torturing their children. Even as Weaver details a nation's despair, she notices its intoxicating charm.

TWILIGHT, by Henry Grunwald (Knopf; \$20). In 1992, the author developed macular degeneration, a disease that causes progressive and irreversible vision loss. It prompted him to consider "the fundamental impulse in all living things to reach for light," and to put down in a clear and unmistakably personal style his thoughts on living with a disability. The result is not so much an anatomy of eyesight as a modest reminder to appreciate what you've got.

FRIENDS TALKING IN THE NIGHT, by Philip Hamburger (Knopf; \$30). This engrossing miscellany—whose subjects include Oppenheimer, Hirschfeld, and Hot Springs, Arkansas—begins with a Talk of the Town piece, written in 1939, on the Bettmann Archive. The Berliner Otto Ludwig Bettmann had set out, in the twenties, to illustrate the history of reading and ended up cataloguing almost everything: "Beautiful Women, Corsets, Headaches, Love, Pain, Plumbing, Rain." Hamburger's own investigations, like those of his subject, arise out of a fervent desire not only to know the world but to capture it.

INTIMACY, by Hanif Kureishi (Scribner; \$16). "It is not how much people demand which surprises me, but how little," explains Jay, the narrator of this rumination on the art of walking out on your family when you no longer love the mother of your children. Jay spends the night before his departure not so much packing his socks as rearranging the drawers in his brain—who, he wonders, will stop to answer his three-year-old's incessant questions when he's gone?—in preparation for the painful necessity of dumping their contents.

THE TRUST, by Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones (Little, Brown; \$29.95). For more than a century, the family that owns the New York Times—the Ochs/Sulzberger clan—has remained hidden from public view. This exhaustively researched book is both a chronicle of a long and remarkably stable stewardship of the Times and a candid account of the family's internal problems, which range from the depression suffered by the dynasty's founder, Adolph Ochs, to the perpetual difficulty of choosing the next head of the world's most influential newspaper.

THE ESSENTIAL GEORGE BOOTH and **THE ESSENTIAL CHARLES BARSOTTI**, compiled and edited by Lee Lorenz (Workman; \$10.95 each). These two paperbacks kick off a new series. Interspersed with the drawings (Booth's lovingly detailed world of seedy yard sales and itchy dogs; Barsotti's kings, puppies, and talking pears, delivering surrealism with a punch) are bits of biography, samples of juvenilia, and cranky interviews with Lorenz, who was *The New Yorker's* art editor for twenty years.

A TAXI TO THE FLAME, by Vickie Karp (South Carolina; \$15.95). These poems surprise by transforming the details of modern life into wild abstractions: a girl's tennis shoes become Aladdin's lamps, "Rubbed to a burnished glow on the courts/And lit now by natural light... However demoted and adjusted for contemporary life." Karp finds consolation for such adjustments in pushing language to opulent, yet precise, extremes.

DOUBLE DOWN, by Frederick and Steven Barthelme (Houghton Mifflin; \$24). In which the Barthelme brothers review their own compulsive gambling on the riverboats off the Mississippi coast. Within a few years, they had lost a quarter-million dollars; then they were arrested for conspiring to cheat the casino. ("They're busting us for losing? We didn't lose enough?") There's some family history here, and a few stabs at an explanation. But mainly the memoir is an evocation of the casinos themselves, and of what it feels like to lose—money, loved ones, youth.

A DEDICATED FOLLOWER OF FASHION, by Holly Brubach (Phaidon; \$29.95). "I have friends who would be surprised to hear that a thinking person could be moved by the sight of a dress, but I have been," Brubach confesses in one of these smart essays, which include disquisitions on French style, the evolution of sunglasses, the legacy of Versace, and the poignancy of an industry devoted to the belief that something can be accomplished by buying new clothes.

BOGGS: A COMEDY OF VALUES, by Lawrence Weschler (Chicago; \$22). J.S.G. Boggs is a performance artist and monetary draftsman extraordinaire who exchanges original renderings of paper currency for goods and services—but only with parties who understand the "worthlessness" of the paper exchanged. Since the start of this career, in 1984, Boggs has become increasingly valued by collectors and museums and increasingly unpopular with the Secret Service as he attempts "ever more daring forays into the borderland between artistic self-expression and legal constraint."

LOVE TROUBLE, by Veronica Geng (Mariner; \$14). Geng, who was an editor and writer at this magazine from 1975 to 1993, once said that her two favorite books were "Alice in Wonderland" and the collected Watergate transcripts, and in these essays it's easy to see why. With a head filled with everything from the cadences of the Times (she wrote the reigning parody of the paper's wedding announcements) to Mao's Little Red Book, she was a parodist of our public clichés and pomposities. Geng died in 1997, at the age of fifty-six.

THE SPORTING LIFE, by Bill Barich (Lyons; \$22.95). The Moscow Red Devils baseball team barnstorms the Bay Area, selling Gorbachev dolls and being soundly defeated by local high schoolers; dicey locals congregate to watch even dicier horses run the Quarter Pole in Rayne, Louisiana, the Frog Capital of the United States. In this tour of oddball outposts in the world of sport, Barich pinpoints those sporting moments which deliver us outside time and allow us a "chance to simply exist."

CREATING HYSTERIA, by Joan Acocella (Jossey-Bass; \$25). When the book "Sybil" came out, in 1973, most people had never heard of multiple-personality disorder; by 1995, tens of thousands of American women had been diagnosed as "MP's" by their therapists. Most of them, like Sybil, had memories of childhood abuse which were "recovered" during therapy; a significant number of them came to believe that they were victims of a satanic cult. In this gimlet-eyed account, Acocella demonstrates the ways in which seemingly uncongenial pockets of American culture—feminists, Christian fundamentalists, psychologists, talk-show hosts—conspired to create an epidemic of devastating consequences.

A REPORTER AT LARGE: DATELINE PYRAMID LAKE, NEVADA, by A. J. Liebling, edited by Elmer R. Rusco (Nevada; \$21.95). In 1949, Liebling went to Reno to get a divorce, and, to distract himself from the casinos, he took an interest in the plight of the Paiutes in nearby Pyramid Lake, who were fighting with the government over land and water rights. His account, published here in 1955, evokes the entire, shameful history of our government's treatment of the Indians. Like all good Liebling stories, it also includes an irresistible rogue: Nevada's blustery Senator Patrick McCarran, who never met a fact he couldn't twist.

THE LAST LOVELY CITY, by Alice Adams (Knopf; \$22). For more than thirty years, in a style noted for its spirited grace and compression, Adams chronicled the fortunes of intelligent men and women crucially moved by romantic and sexual connection. "I liked your face," one woman says to her bemused new lover. "I always go for those narrow, cold, mean eyes." In this collection, Adams's last, her response to place—France, Italy, Mexico, and, particularly, San Francisco, the city of the title—is especially vivid.

ELEGY FOR IRIS, by John Bayley (St. Martin's; \$22.95). In Bayley's memoir of his marriage to the novelist Iris Murdoch, their shared innocence and playful intellectuality become a means for Bayley to contend with the onset of Alzheimer's in his wife. He listens with pleasure as she "titters away incomprehensibly but self-confidently," and, bantering in response, reassures her with a line from Byron and a "solemnly meaningful look." Throughout, Iris remains a dignified presence, even after the emptiness of the disease has taken hold.

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THE THEATRE

OPEN SECRETS

A hacker's field day, and a musical Medea.

BY JOHN LAHR



IN the summer of 1959, after Arthur Kopit graduated from Harvard, he wrote a play—"Oh, Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad"—that went on

to become an international hit, announcing both Kopit's ingeniousness and his daring. Kopit, who studied engineering, likes to build complex structures. With "Indians" (1968), a Wild West extravaganza that, to my mind, is the best play about Vietnam and how we got there, he found a wonderful metaphor for America's habitual historical amnesia. In "Wings" (1979), his hallucinatory and poetic examination of aphasia, the fictionalizing of the past was translated from public to private tragedy. "Y2K," a Manhattan Theatre Club production at the Lucille Lortel, is another of Kopit's brilliant speculations informed by fact, an unnerving hall of mirrors that adds a new perspective to his obsession with memory and identity. As up to the minute as the Melissa virus and the Explore.Zip worm, "Y2K" brings news of the cyber abuse of privacy and shows us how personal history can be rewritten at a computer hacker's whim. Here, history is not fiction agreed upon but fiction imposed upon others.

In this case, the young cyber subversive is a brooding leather-jacketed cretin named Costra Astrakhan (the furtive

Erik Jensen) and known to F.B.I. men who are pursuing him by his aliases: BCuzICan, FlowBare, and ISeeU. "I am everywhere—on the outskirts of your mind, in the ether, in the darkness," he confides to us as the play opens. "And when I'm on the hunt, as relentless as the



Creating a techno-fiction: Erik Jensen as a cyberpunk who sabotages the lives of a Park Avenue couple in "Y2K."

wrath of God." Astrakhan has the power to re-create the virtual universe at will in his own demented image. Unseen by his victims onstage, he is a techno-demiurge who speaks only to us. "I can see all of you!" Astrakhan brags about his search-and-destroy missions. "Your cunts, your bank accounts, your charge accounts."

In Astrakhan's swaggering mockery Kopit manages to convey an uncanny sense of both the hacker's alienation and

RICHARD MERKIN

his intellectual arrogance. His mother, Astrakhan tells us, was a "dental hygienist and sometime prostitute, stomped to death by her former husband, a tap dancer with Tourette's syndrome." He adds, "Lucky thing they were not my *real* folks. I'd be all fucked up by now." Astrakhan, who steals the secrets of other people as a means of inflicting his own emptiness on them, acts as if every boundary were an extension of parental authority, which he must transgress. "Really, breaking into where you're not supposed to go, it's a kickass fucking turn-on," he says.

Astrakhan is drawn to invade the lives of a suave Park Avenue couple called the Elliots, two pillars of respectability whom he taunts and finally topples. Joseph Elliot (the cool, sardonic James Naughton) is an editor at Random House who also teaches a renowned course in fiction-writing at the New School, from which, it seems, Astrakhan was bounced for plagiarizing a rather sensational piece of pornography as his entrance credential. ("Everything you invent is true" is one of Elliot's frequently quoted bons mots to the class.) Joanne Elliot (Patricia Kalember), who works at Sotheby's, in the ceramics department, was briefly married to a highly sexed venture capitalist named Summerhays, and he is still after her. "Sometimes, I have to tell you, I am really staggered at how little you seem to understand me," Joanne tells her husband as they glibly bicker about Summerhays's habit of pestering her with phone calls at work. "Actually, I don't think I understand you at all," Joseph counters. Here, the vivid abstractions of cyberspace are played off against the actuality of relationships, which have their own unfathomable dimension.

When we first meet Joseph, he is being interrogated by two F.B.I. men, for Astrakhan, with doctored records and digitally modified photographs, has supplied the Elliots with a compelling new profile: he is a child pornographer, she is a porn star. Strategically, Kopit wants to challenge the solidity of both the Elliots' and the audience's sense of reality. Nothing is what it seems. Astrakhan's account, addressed to the audience, of a meeting he had with the Elliots—Joseph's praising him for his writing; Joanne's appearing nude out of the shower to point him in the direction of the men's room and their subsequent "fuckfest"—is later shown to be categorically untrue.

But it's part of Kopit's plan to put us exactly where the two anguished protagonists sit—at first bemused, then outraged, then no longer quite sure even of their coherence. "But all of it is *not* fake," Joseph says, staring at his wife coldly. "Is it?" She doesn't reply. He goes on, "Things he has found—about me—and which he's tucked in with all the really dreadful 'invented' stuff—which are going to come out, and which you will see and will not I think be especially pleased to see. Nothing really vile, nothing criminal, but then again, nothing anyone would be proud of. And for all that I am very deeply sorry." Joseph resigns his job, and their lawyer suggests that Joanne do the same. For her part, Joanne protests her innocence about the compromising photos that Astrakhan has leaked onto the Internet, some of them images of her with her ex-husband. She wants her husband's absolution, which isn't forthcoming; these pictures don't look doctored. She wants, she says, to hear him say, "I know it's not you"; and he has to say it twice before it has the ring of conviction.

By the end of the play, Astrakhan has stolen the Elliots' bank accounts, their faith in each other, even their bloodline. (He has written himself into Joseph's story as his "long-lost father" and has falsified medical records to prove it.) They are trapped both in a cyber fiction and, as we see, in the fictions they've built around their marriage, and there is no escape from either. Bob Balaban's serviceable direction doesn't tease all the dark music out of this cunning script; but, underneath the cyber-thriller aspect of Kopit's story, his sense of the bewildering mystery and fragility of relationships comes through loud and chillingly clear.

"I LIKE to keep an audience guessing," Michael John LaChiusa wrote recently in the *Times* about his work. In "Marie Christine" (at Lincoln Center), his freely adapted version of "Medea," he wants to move the musical toward opera; in other words, to turn a popular form into an elitist one. But "Marie Christine" is not an opera; it is also not a musical. It is, I guess, an "opsical," which could be defined as an empty vessel that makes a big sound. Set in New Orleans and Chicago, the show deals with the blighted love between a Creole woman (Audra McDonald) and her feckless white boyfriend (Anthony Crivello), and it touches on Big Issues about which LaChiusa,

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who is high on technique and ambition and low on talent, has nothing to say: racism, miscegenation, love, revenge. The production has Christopher Barreca's handsome, brooding set; gorgeous lighting, by Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer; David Pleasant's sensational bongo playing; Graciela Daniele's fluid staging; and, most important, the extraordinary voice of McDonald, who is a force of nature. But all this prowess is in aid of a weak story, in which the audience never has a stake.

The problem is a narrative one. In a prelude, the eponymous heroine is discovered in prison with her cellmates bearing witness to her tale, and this both preempts suspense and insures detachment. Instead of experiencing the drama with the heroine, as in the original tragedy, we're outside it. What we're witnessing

is not "events," exactly, but songs that describe what we're seeing acted out on-stage. "He was a stranger/He was lost up on Pontchartrain/Said he was looking for a pretty smile/Would I oblige?/I obliged," Marie Christine sings as she and Crivello's Dante cross paths. Instead of discovery, we have illustration. We also have no tragic inevitability. LaChiusa has given his heroine voodoo powers strong enough to kill her husband's mistress but not potent enough to keep him from leaving her. It's all dramaturgically unconvincing. A wave of her mother's hand and Marie Christine has her mojo working; one scene and one song are enough to give her two young sons and a happy family; and when she dispatches the boys she does it neatly offstage, without a whiff of blood or barbarity to upset the subscriber audience. ♦

mer celebrity quiz kid whose life has fizzled out, launches into a poetically deranged display of self-pity in a bar. This borderline-ludicrous film is filled with startling arias of complaint. Everyone has a favorite good bad movie; "Magnolia" is a rare case of a great terrible movie.

In an attempt to justify what he's about to show us, Anderson begins with a deft little prologue in which he recreates, with deadpan cool, three wildly improbable events—a couple of murders and a freak accident. The events have nothing to do with the movie, but they prime us for off-center tragedy, and for metaphysical oddity. "Magnolia" is certainly filled with coincidences and overlapping plot elements: there are two elderly men dying of cancer, each with an estranged grown child; Macy's former quiz kid is matched by a new quiz kid, a moon-faced little boy doing his stuff on a TV show; Philip Seymour Hoffman's male nurse, an angelic figure, is doubled by a Los Angeles cop, a lonely guy with a religious and compassionate temperament, played with surpassing sweetness by John C. Reilly. I'm not sure what the doubling accomplishes except to bring a meaningless rhyming effect to highly emotional material. Anderson doesn't prepare his situations much; he just lets fly, catching the characters at the point of misery or breakdown. Tom Cruise, in shoulder-length hair, turns up as a manic sex guru who hosts a cable-TV show called "Seduce and Destroy." Pumping his arms and his pelvis, Cruise is pretty damn funny, but he's so revved he has nowhere to go but down. Julianne Moore, as Robards's adulterous young wife, does better. Moore has a curtain of dark-red hair and a long white face—an overly composed expression, a mask almost, which suddenly collapses into rage. Her character doesn't make sense, but this actress is so good at eccentric fits that we're mesmerized by the sheer spectacle of her anger.

Despite the prologue, the main body of the film is not as radical as I imagine Anderson would like to think. Most of it is fairly commonplace, Arthur Miller-type stuff about how you can't escape the past, you can't escape the evil you've done, and what we all really need is to be truthful with one another.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

SAN FERNANDO ARIA

"Magnolia" is a carnival of acting; "The Green Mile" sells salvation.

BY DAVID DENBY



PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON, in his new movie, "Magnolia," has become a virtuoso of freak-out scenes. His characters break down, fall apart, and denounce themselves and others. The movie, which is composed of Altmanesque multiple vignettes, has no common theme, so it becomes a kind of mad crackup derby. The characters are tormented by offenses so rank that they cry out to Heaven—or, at least, to the camera, and the actors, given a chance, pour out the emotions as if their lives depended on it. The dismay and disorder lead to an apocalypse of sorts: the neon-lit, car-crossed streets of the Valley are suddenly visited with a rain of frogs—thousands of them, falling down on the ranch houses, crashing through windows, and sending vehicles piling into one another. Mother of God, it's raining amphibians in Burbank! The Biblical reference, how-

ever, is puzzling. There's nothing like Pharaoh in the movie, and no Moses, either—just a group of unhappy Californians with their everyday sins. Do they deserve so severe a punishment? In the end, the director seems to be having the biggest crackup of all.

Anderson loves the camera, and he loves actors, too, and some day he will make a marvellous film. "Boogie Nights" was overrated, I thought, perhaps because people were amazed that a sensitive movie about the porno scene was possible at all. The picture was skillful and touching, but it didn't add up; it didn't build to anything. "Magnolia" doesn't really add up, either, but it's a richer film. Anderson has developed a remarkably fluid style of camera movement and editing, which allows him to link the most disparate kinds of experience, and he has become a pungent, idiosyncratic writer. Jason Robards, playing a dying old bastard, lies in bed and growls wonderful bitter nonsense; William H. Macy, as a for-

The movie is an anthology of great acting moments, and its speed and rhythm never falter, even when the ideas become banal. Anderson is a tremendous talent, but he needs to trust story more, just as Welles and Huston—to name the company he might join someday—did before him.

THE GREEN MILE,” based on Stephen King’s 1996 serial novel, is a three-hour-and-eight-minute religious allegory about a black convict,

cution of an inmate, crying, at the point of death, “He’s mine! He’s mine now!” The other evil character is merely a sadist, who crushes the mouse. The little creature is healed, or resurrected, perhaps, by the black convict, who places glowing hands around it. Tom Hanks has a urinary infection, and the convict cures *that* by grabbing Hanks’s crotch, an act that later creates quite a glow between Tom and his wife. “The Green Mile,” as perhaps you’ve gathered, is about good and evil, miracles

enjoys tormenting the condemned prisoners. Darabont takes his time, to put it mildly, in setting up his situations. He creates the relations among the guards, and the relations among the guards and the prisoners. He repeats small moments and little tag lines; he gives each of the prisoners a crazy riff or two. Is there such a thing as commercial pedantry? This movie embodies it. We get a rehearsal of electric-chair procedures, with one of the prisoners serving as a dummy. Darabont teaches us about the current, and how it affects the light bulbs, and about the wet sponge placed on the convict’s head, and so on, and then we get to sit through not one, not two, but *three* executions. The bodies twitch wildly, and, in one case, flames spurt from the victim’s head. As the men die, the saintly convict quivers and weeps and speaks of the need for love in the world. But somehow, in the midst of the preaching about goodness, the movie never raises the question of whether capital punishment might be wrong or whether electrocution might not be a peculiarly obscene way of carrying it out. The movie talks of love but excites the audience with convulsed bodies and flaming heads. Hypocrisy like this blinds itself with the grandiosity of its illusions. How could the filmmakers possibly know that they are treating the audience like a bunch of tent-show suckers? The picture, after all, is about salvation and a black Jesus.

John Coffey is seven feet tall and weighs three hundred and thirty pounds, and the movie plays uneasily with the racial drama of a huge black man under the control of some ordinary-sized whites. Of course, nothing but beatific irony is intended: despite his size and his enormous strength, Coffey is so gentle that he wouldn’t hurt a mouse. Paul Edgecomb, extending his hand in greeting, immediately senses this. But in 1999, when tall black men with every kind of disposition race up and down the courts of the nation’s fantasies, the spectacle of whites accepting a seven-foot black as benevolent has a tinge of bizarre and unnecessary self-congratulation. “The Green Mile” is a fantasy of taming the black giant, passing itself off as liberal humanism. John Coffey is not just good, he’s Jesus—he works miracles. Yes, but he’s still not a man. ♦



The off-center tragedians of Valley life: Julianne Moore as an eccentric adulteress, and William H. Macy as a former quiz kid whose life has fizzled out.

a white prison guard, and a mouse. The convict (Michael Clarke Duncan) is huge, soft-spoken, and entirely good; his name is John Coffey, and he may be Jesus Christ. (Well, he’s definitely Jesus Christ—look at his initials.) The guard is Tom Hanks, who is pretty much the secular version of the same thing. The mouse lives where the convict does, on death row—known, from the color of its linoleum floor, as the green mile—and is blessed with a very long life. He represents survival, I think. Or perhaps he represents *Life Itself*. In any case, he represents *something*, and, again and again, as he pitter-patters across the green floor, everyone stops and stares at him. The movie also has two evil characters, one of whom is probably the Devil; he spits at people and exults during the electro-

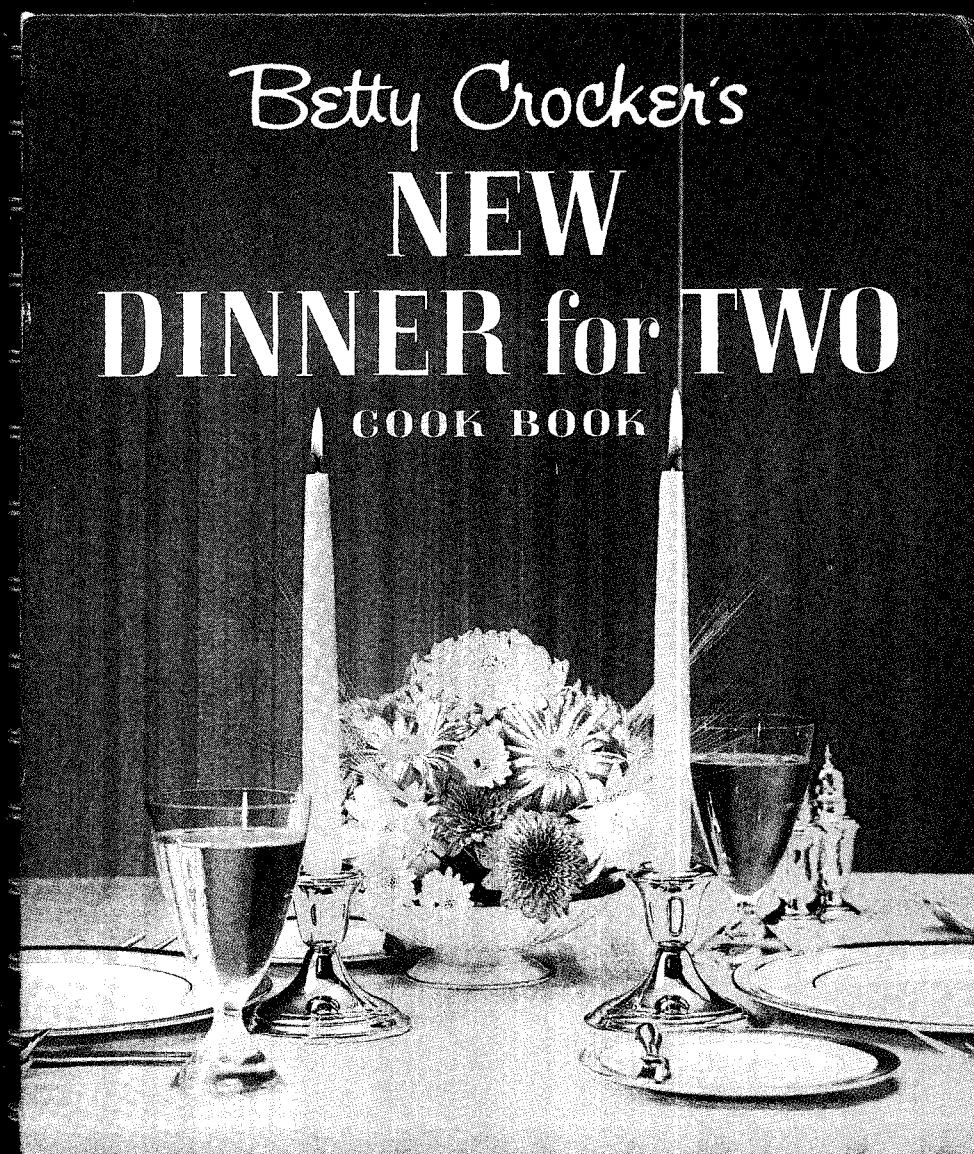
and redemption, and I sat through it in a misery of embarrassment and irritation, increased by the sure knowledge that the movie will give comfort, and possibly even strength, to millions of people. The writer-director Frank Darabont has achieved precisely that combination of the uncanny, the violent, and the stupid which seems to operate like a Mickey Finn on the hard common sense and good humor of the American public.

“The Green Mile” starts in the present. A very old man—the Tom Hanks character, Paul Edgecomb—recounts his time as a death-row guard way back there in 1935. Paul was the benevolent boss of a small crew of guards, all disciplined and humane men, with the exception of the nasty little mouse-crusher, Percy (Doug Hutchison), who



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